United Nations S/PV.5825

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5825th meeting

Wednesday, 23 January 2008, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Ettalhi	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Belle
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	Costa Rica	Mr. Weisleder
	Croatia	Mrs. Mladineo
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Ms. Eloeva
	South Africa	Mr. Seakamela
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Brooker
	United States of America	Ms. Wolcott
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

Letter dated 22 November 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/920)

Report of the Secretary-General on the request of Nepal for United Nations assistance in support of its peace process (S/2008/5)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

08-21520 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Letter dated 22 November 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/920)

Report of the Secretary-General on the request of Nepal for United Nations assistance in support of its peace process (S/2008/5)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Nepal, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Acharya (Nepal) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/34, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Members of the Council also have before them document S/2008/5, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the request of Nepal for United Nations assistance in support of its peace process. I would like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to copies of a letter dated 27 December 2007 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Panama, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Viet Nam.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1796 (2008).

I now give the floor to the representative of Nepal.

Mr. Acharya (Nepal): I am taking the floor to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to you, Mr. President, and all the other members of the Council for your constructive support in the process of adopting this resolution extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). I also take this opportunity to especially thank the British delegation for taking pains in drafting and arriving at a consensus on the resolution.

I also take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the subject (S/2008/5), reflecting the developments on the ground and developments in the peace process in Nepal. I also want to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ian Martin, for all the work he has done during the process and to the team of officials of the Secretariat who have been helping with the process.

With the adoption of this resolution, I am confident that during the next six months Nepal will be able to achieve progress in the peace process, including the holding of Constituent Assembly election in April 2008. I want to assure you, Sir, and the other members of the Council that Nepal will fully cooperate with the Special Representative and UNMIN in implementing the mandate that has been adopted.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no further speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.5826

Security Council

Distr.: General
25 January 2008

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 5826th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 25 January 2008, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 25 January 2008, the Security Council, pursuant to resolution 1353 (2001), annex II, sections A and B, held its 5826th meeting in private with the troop-contributing countries to the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

"The Security Council and the troop-contributing countries heard a briefing under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure by Mr. Azouz Ennifar, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Ethiopia and Eritrea.

"Members of the Council, Mr. Ennifar and representatives of participating troop-contributing countries had an exchange of views."

08-21831 (E) 250108

United Nations S/PV.5827

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5827th meeting

Wednesday, 30 January 2008, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Ettalhi	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Muharemi
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Spatafora
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

08-22132 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Israel, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 22 January 2008 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2008/51 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council which will be held on Wednesday, 30 January 2008, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Pascoe to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I now give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: This past month has underscored the gap between the aspirations of the political process and the grim realities of the situation on the ground in the Middle East. Continued efforts to progress along the Annapolis track, with the beginning of negotiations on core issues and a visit by the President of the United States of America, George W. Bush, were overshadowed by an intensification of violence in Gaza and southern Israel, combined with periods of total closure of the Gaza Strip and increased humanitarian suffering and violations of human rights.

Since I last briefed the Council, on 22 January, there have been significant developments in the crisis in Gaza.

On 23 January, Palestinian militants destroyed entire sections of the border fence with Egypt. Since then, hundreds of thousands of Gazans have crossed the border, and many who had earlier been stranded in Egypt have returned to Gaza. Following efforts by Egyptian security forces to close the border on 25 January, Hamas toppled additional sections of the border fence. A number of Egyptian security personnel sustained injuries when fired upon by Palestinian militants, but they exercised restraint, and the situation remained, by and large, calm. By 29 January, shops in the border area had largely run out of goods, and Egyptian forces took steps to begin sealing the border.

In Egypt, Palestinians purchased food, medicine and other supplies that are mostly unavailable in Gaza due to closure. There have also been claims, which we

are unable to verify, of weapons and explosives entering Gaza. We support Egypt's continuing efforts to find a peaceful and orderly solution along the border.

From 18 January, when Israel imposed a comprehensive closure, until yesterday, only 32 truckloads of goods entered Gaza, including 10 from a Jordanian donation. That compares to a daily average of 93 trucks during the first two weeks of 2008 and of 250 trucks before June 2007. There is now a backlog of approximately 224 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), World Health Organization and World Food Programme (WFP) trucks, although we understand that 35 trucks of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross have been scheduled to go into Gaza today. WFP distributions in some areas of Gaza have already run out of sugar and salt, and UNRWA reported that its stocks of canned meat would run out within a week. United Nations Palestinian staff with permits to exit Gaza are not currently allowed to do so, resulting in the hampering of United Nations operations.

Fuel imports from Israel resumed on 22 January, with a total of 1.566 million litres of industrial diesel going into Gaza from Israel for the week ending 27 January. It is expected that 2.2 million litres of industrial fuel will be allowed this week; however, just over 3 million litres are necessary to avoid power cuts, and reserves of up to 20 million litres are necessary to ensure normal functioning of the power plant. At the current level of fuel supply, electricity cuts will continue, in some areas for as much as eight hours a day.

Some water wells are functioning again after being reconnected to electricity and functioning generators, but UNICEF reports that 40 per cent of Gazans still have limited access to safe water.

The crisis adds new urgency to the proposal of the Palestinian Authority to operate the Gaza crossings. We reiterate the Secretary-General's strong support for those proposals, and welcome the recent Arab League and European Council resolutions in that respect. We also welcome the diplomatic efforts currently under way on that issue. We call on all parties to work urgently for the controlled reopening of the crossings in and out of the Strip for both humanitarian reasons and commercial flows, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant international agreements related to access and movement concluded in November 2005. Such flows should include materials and equipment to enable United Nations rehousing and rubble removal projects to resume. The United Nations stands ready to assist efforts to implement the Palestinian Authority's proposals in any way it can.

It has been a month of heavy bloodshed; a total of 108 Palestinians have been killed and 229 injured in conflict with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Three Israelis have been killed and 24 injured by Palestinian militants. IDF incursions into West Bank cities and towns continue on a regular basis. During the reporting period, for example, the entire city of Nablus was placed under curfew for three days in early January. There were also a number of incidents of violence in the West Bank, including in occupied East Jerusalem, where Palestinian militants attacked Israeli border police and religious seminary students.

Today, Israel's Supreme Court declared legal the reductions to the fuel and electricity supply of Gaza. The ruling effectively approves the decision adopted by the Government on 19 September 2007 to impose sanctions on the Gaza Strip in response to continued rocket and mortar fire on Israel. I take this opportunity to remind the Council of the Secretary-General's statement of 19 September, in which he noted his concern for the 1.4 million residents of Gaza — including the old, the young and the sick — who are already suffering from the impact of prolonged closure, and said that they should not be punished for the unacceptable actions of militants and extremists.

We note that levels of violence have been significantly reduced in the past week in Gaza and southern Israel. We remain concerned, however, that 77 rockets and mortars were fired in the past week by Palestinian militants and that there were also four IDF incursions and air strikes on Gaza.

In last week's briefing, the United Nations condemned the firing of rockets against civilians in southern Israel and called on all parties to abide by international law and not endanger civilians. The United Nations has also clearly stated its deep concerns over Israeli military actions, including targeted killings and the grave humanitarian consequences of Israel's closure policy. As such, I will not repeat those statements of position at this time.

On a more positive note, the parties began negotiations on the core issues during the reporting period. United States President Bush visited the region and committed himself to doing all he could to ensure that a peace agreement is achieved in 2008. He stressed that the point of departure for permanent status negotiations was "an end to the occupation that began in 1967", and made a number of public observations regarding borders, refugees, Jerusalem and security. He also issued strong calls for both sides to fulfil their commitments under the road map, including for removal of outposts and a settlement freeze, and for action against violence and terrorism. United States General William Fraser has been appointed to lead United States efforts to monitor implementation of phase I of the road map in accordance with the Annapolis joint understanding.

The Paris donor conference co-chairs — the European Commission, Norway, France and Quartet Representative Tony Blair — met last week to follow up on commitments made by participants in Paris. The chairs stressed the importance of tangible and visible changes on the ground through implementing the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) without delay. The total amount of aid pledged has reached $7.7 billion. A significant number of donors intend to transfer their aid to the single treasury account of the Palestinian Authority. Co-chairs have agreed to meet again in March.

At the request of Prime Minister Fayyad, the World Bank is putting in place arrangements for a new multi-donor trust fund to channel donor support to the Palestinian Authority's recurrent operating budget. The European Commission has announced that the Palestinian European aid mechanism, designed in close consultation with the Palestinian Authority, will be launched on 1 February as a follow-up to the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM). That mechanism will be open to all donors and will combine investment and recurrent support more comprehensively than TIM currently does.

Quartet Representative Blair continues his efforts to secure implementation of projects to support Palestinian economic revitalization. The United Nations country team met earlier this week to strengthen interagency coordination, particularly in support of PRDP.

Palestinian reform efforts and the assistance of donors cannot make a sustained impact without a significant easing of closure, in accordance with the Agreement on Movement and Access. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that there are 563 obstacles to Palestinian movement in the West Bank. It is vital that those closures be eased in the context of increased mobility, security and confidence.

In that regard, Palestinian Authority security forces continue to work to maintain law and order, including disarming and arresting militants. We encourage the Palestinian Authority to continue and deepen its efforts to meet its phase-I road map obligations on security, and call for improved cooperation to support those efforts.

The Secretary-General has reaffirmed the United Nations position on the illegality of settlements. Phase I of the road map requires the Government of Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including "natural growth". We call on Israel to act to meet its obligations to halt settlement activity, dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001 and reopen Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem. Construction work on the barrier continues within occupied Palestinian territory in deviation from the Green Line and contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Turning to Lebanon's political and security developments continue to be a cause for serious concern. On the political front, Lebanon's parliamentary session on the election of a president has been delayed for the thirteenth time, until 11 February. Despite the diplomatic efforts led by the League of Arab States, the parties are no closer to reaching an agreement. The presidential vacuum has persisted since 24 November and has led to a situation that is dangerous and ultimately unsustainable. Lebanon's leaders must act now and find a way to bridge their positions and return the country to normal political activity.

Political uncertainty has been exacerbated further by the increased frequency of grave security incidents. On 27 January, demonstrations began in a southern suburb of Beirut, apparently to protest interruptions to the electricity supply in the area. The unrest led to the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and security services in the area in an attempt to restore calm. Demonstrations soon spread to the towns of Tyre and Khiam in southern Lebanon and to north-eastern parts of the Bekaa valley. By nightfall, seven people had been killed and up to 40 wounded. The Lebanese army has announced that it will investigate the deaths.

On 25 January, Lebanon suffered yet another targeted assassination when an explosion in Beirut killed Captain Wissam Eid and Adjutant Osama Mereib of the Internal Security Forces and four other people and injured up to twenty others. On 15 January, a car bomb explosion in an industrial area of Beirut killed three passers-by and wounded dozens. A diplomatic vehicle from the United States Embassy in Lebanon was also impacted in the bombing and both occupants were wounded.

Aside from attacks on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), this is the first attack on a diplomatic target in Beirut since the days of Lebanon's civil war. In addition, early in the morning of 21 January, a hand grenade was detonated in a residential area of Beirut. The explosion caused material damage but no injuries. There have been no claims of responsibility for these incidents.

The situation in the UNIFIL area of operations has remained mostly quiet but tense, particularly in the wake of several incidents that occurred on 7 and 8 January, on which the Council has already been briefed by Under-Secretary-General Guéhenno. UNIFIL and the LAF are continuing their investigations into the 8 January attack against a UNIFIL vehicle. Similarly, the investigation into the 8 January rocket firings against the northern Israeli town of Shelomi is continuing. There have been no claims of responsibility made. The Secretary-General issued statements condemning both incidents. On 21 January, the Lebanese Armed Forces fired on two Israeli aircraft within Lebanese airspace inside UNIFIL's area of operations.

The Secretary-General has strongly condemned the grave security incidents during this last month and has called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

In the North, the United Nations system, under the operational guidance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, continues to provide humanitarian assistance and to undertake emergency rehabilitation initiatives in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el-Bared, where the Lebanese army confronted the Fatah al-Islam armed group from May to September 2007.

The Secretary-General fully supports the efforts of Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to reach a peace agreement in 2008 and encourages them to make tangible progress on all core issues, including final status issues. However, it is equally critical that the situation on the ground should stabilize and improve, in order to sustain the Annapolis process.

The Secretary-General will continue to work closely with Quartet partners, regional countries and this Council towards implementation of the Road Map and a two-State solution that would result in the coexistence in peace and security of the State of Israel and the State of Palestine, in fulfilment of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for the briefing he has provided. We will begin by giving the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing to the Security Council today on current developments. I also wish to express the thanks of my delegation to you, Mr. President, for your guidance and for the efforts over the past week throughout a difficult process aimed at focusing the Security Council's attention on the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

This continued prevailing crisis is the cumulative result of the illegal, cruel and deliberate policies and practices of Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip. It has involved — as mentioned by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe — the illegal collective punishment of the population through the total closure of Gaza's border crossings and the obstruction of access to essential humanitarian supplies and fuel, as well as military attacks in Gaza by the occupying forces, which have caused much death, destruction and widespread suffering among the civilian population.

The efforts of the Council presidency were intended to steer the Council towards responding to this humanitarian tragedy and alleviating the human suffering of the Palestinian civilian population by calling upon Israel, the occupying Power, to open the border crossings of the Gaza Strip and to allow for the safe passage of humanitarian personnel, urgently needed food, medicine and fuel and persons in need of medical treatment outside of Gaza.

Regrettably, however, the Security Council was once again unable to reach consensus and has thus been unable to act effectively to address the situation. Although the draft presidential statement that had been

under consideration fell short of adequately and justly addressing this situation through lifting the blockade and thus responding to the humanitarian plight of our besieged people in Gaza, that draft would nevertheless have constituted a minimal response by the Council to that crisis, which continues to this day.

In that regard, we thank those members of the Security Council that expressed their support for the draft presidential statement, and we also express our appreciation for the principled positions taken by the majority of Security Council members towards this humanitarian issue and by all those who participated in the debate last week and conveyed their firm solidarity with the Palestinian people at this difficult time.

In that context, the Arab Group engaged constructively in this exercise under the leadership of the Saudi Arabian delegation, chair of the Arab Group this month. The Group demonstrated a high degree of flexibility and remained focused on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, with the hope of seeing the Security Council assume its responsibilities and respond in a timely, practical manner to this ongoing and escalating tragedy. Unfortunately, this was not the case. We wish to express our deep disappointment that, although we turned to the Security Council and appealed for action, no decisive action was taken. The failure by the Security Council to deal with this issue will not help to ameliorate the situation on the ground, it will not help advance the peace process and, indeed, it will not stimulate people's confidence in the ability of the Security Council to effectively address the serious issues that come before it, such as those we are now faced with.

As we meet here today, the Palestinian humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues to unfold and expand, with both foreseeable and unforeseeable consequences for the Palestinian civilian population, for the stability of our region and for the prospects for peace. The policy of starving and imposing poverty and imprisonment on an entire civilian population can never bring calm or contribute to an environment conducive to the pursuit of peace. Combined with the violent military assaults and war crimes relentlessly committed by Israel, the occupying Power, these policies will only deepen the despair and hopelessness of the Palestinian people and further destabilize the situation. That will then lead to the fomenting of further resentment and frustration, fuelling the vicious cycle of violence we have long tried to break, including through several unilateral ceasefires worked out by President Abbas that have been repeatedly undermined by the occupying Power.

Today, despite our appeals and the international outcry following Israel's escalation of its siege and aggression against Gaza, no real action has been taken and the situation continues to deteriorate. What we have witnessed in recent days on the Gaza-Egypt border in Rafah was a troubling and stark indication of the depth of the desperation and deprivation of the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza. In this regard, we wish to express our deep appreciation to the Government of Egypt for the calm and sensitivity with which it has dealt with this event.

Indeed, most of the thousands of people who streamed across the border were merely seeking to satisfy the basic needs of their families for food, medicine and fuel for survival and, for many, to satisfy the need for freedom of movement, even if for a short time, following months of imprisonment in a very small space in the Gaza Strip.

We reiterate that no pretext, reasoning or logic can justify such inhumane and brutal treatment of innocent civilians. Children, women, elderly persons, disabled people, ill persons and entire families should not, for any reason whatsoever, be forced into destitution nor into near-starvation, be forced to do without the basic necessities of life and be subjected to constant Israeli military assaults and terror. It is unjustifiable and morally unconscionable. International law is supposed to protect civilians during times of armed conflict, including foreign occupation, from measures of collective punishment and reprisal, which are strictly prohibited.

What is happening in Gaza is a deliberate man-made catastrophe. The international community must continue to vociferously reject this situation, and Israel, the occupying Power, should be called upon to immediately cease the unlawful policies and practices that have created it. Israel should be compelled to abide by its obligations under international law, including its obligations towards the civilian population under its occupation, in accordance with the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention. Regardless of the excuses put forward by it, Israel cannot and should not be absolved of its responsibilities in this regard. Israel must be held accountable. The situation before us thus requires urgent humanitarian action as well as political action.

In this regard, we reiterate the need to respond to the proposal made by the Palestinian Authority that it should assume responsibility for the Palestinian side of the Gaza border crossings. The Arab ministerial meeting of 27 January 2008 endorsed this proposal, which has already received Quartet as well as broad international support. It has also earned the support of the Security Council, as it deliberated on the draft presidential statement last week and early this week.

President Abbas is in Cairo today, discussing this matter with President Hosni Mubarak within the context of previous agreements. This proposal is the practical, sustainable means of addressing the humanitarian crisis caused by the collective punishment of 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. It will enable the opening of the crossings and the necessary movement of persons and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip. Israel is obligated under international law to ensure such movement and the safe, unfettered access of humanitarian personnel, including personnel of the United Nations, at the forefront of which on the ground is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which continues to provide vital assistance to the Palestinian civilian population at this time. On behalf of Palestine, we wish to express our thanks to UNRWA for the noble work it does, particularly in Gaza.

The picture before us now in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is regrettably bleak. Progress in the newly relaunched peace process remains elusive, while challenges continue to be on the rise. Despite the recent momentum and hopes generated by developments in the international arena, including the important Annapolis conference, which led to the resumption of bilateral negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, and despite the Paris donors' conference and the visit of President George Bush of the United States to the region earlier this month, it is the current developments on the ground, as Under-Secretary-General Pascoe stated, that are now shaping our environment and will determine the course of future events. In this regard, momentum and hope are being seriously harmed by Israel's unlawful practices vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip, as well as by its continued pursuit of illegal policies in the West Bank, aimed mainly at advancing its illegitimate expansionist aims.

As we have repeatedly brought to Council's attention in our letters regarding the situation, Israel continues to carry out its illegal colonization campaign through out the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and the surrounding area. It has been a relentless campaign and, although the instances are too numerous to recount here, some do exemplify the severity of the situation. Immediately after the Annapolis Conference, Israeli officials announced the continuation of settlement construction in Jabal Abu Ghneim — Har Homa — in occupied East Jerusalem. Israel has continued its construction of settlements in the Jordan Valley. Furthermore, last week Israeli bulldozers razed large areas of the Al-Quds University campus, in Beit Hanina, for road construction intended to connect illegal Israeli settlements.

The fact that the Israeli settlements established in the occupied Palestinian territory constitute grave breaches of international law is indisputable, having been affirmed by the Security Council, the General Assembly, the International Court of Justice, the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention and, indeed, by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as stressed by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe in his statement this morning. The fact that they constitute a serious obstacle to the establishment of a physically viable, contiguous independent Palestinian State, and thus to the achievement of peace, is also indisputable.

The Road Map, endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003), clearly calls for an Israeli freeze on all settlement activities and for the dismantling of all settlement outposts. The Quartet has repeatedly called on Israel to abide by that obligation. Nevertheless, despite pledges to cease those illegal activities, Israel, the occupying Power, continues its colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem, through its construction of settlements, the wall and the bypass roads, as well as through all other illegal measures intended to facilitate its plans for a de facto annexation. Those measures include, inter alia, the confiscation of land, the demolition of houses, restrictions on residency and the permit regime.

In addition to their illegality, such colonization activities are extremely provocative. They gravely undermine the credibility of the peace process and raise serious doubts as to Israel's good faith in negotiations, since it cannot even cease its illegal actions and continues to create still more obstacles on the ground. In that regard, the settlements and the

wall — which are also having a grave impact on the Palestinians' socio-economic conditions — clearly jeopardize the prospects of achieving a peace settlement based on the two-State solution, as they severely fragment the Palestinian territory and destroy its unity, integrity, contiguity and viability.

Thus, we reiterate our appeals to the international community to call upon — indeed, to compel — Israel to immediately cease all its illegal settlement activities and its construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, to abide by its legal obligations and to immediately undertake confidence-building measures that indicate its seriousness in addressing this issue.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, the occupying Power continues to impose severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods through hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks, which have not been reduced since the relaunching of the peace process and which continue to have a negative impact on the socio-economic life and recovery of the Palestinians. In addition, while several prisoners have been released, daily arrest campaigns are being carried out by Israel, and Israel has maintained the number of Palestinians in Israeli jails and detention centres at nearly 11,000, including hundreds of children and women, most of whom are being held in deplorable conditions. Moreover, Israel continues to conduct military raids in Palestinian towns and cities, including attacks on Palestinian security forces, thus deliberately undermining the efforts, the achievements and the credibility of the Palestinian Authority with respect to promoting calm and security for its own people.

These are all serious issues that require attention and action. They also call into question Israel's true intentions concerning the peace process, because their continuation only ensures further deterioration of the situation on the ground, hampers progress in the peace process and threatens the entire process.

There can be no balance and no justice in the continuation of this situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. Once again, Israel remains unaccountable for its human rights violations and its grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Calls and efforts for action at this critical juncture have been subordinated to calls and efforts for "balance" in what is, at its core, an extremely unbalanced situation.

While we are aware that both sides have responsibilities under international law and commitments under the agreements reached in the peace process, to which the Palestinian leadership is committed, this remains a situation of the foreign occupation of an entire people, with daily violations of their basic rights by the occupying Power through collective punishment, military aggression and other illegal measures. It is a situation in which the might of power continues to prevail and to be emboldened, and in which the forces for peace continue to be weakened. But it is also a situation that is untenable and unsustainable and that must be resolved. It is a situation for which there is no military solution and for which there must be a courageous and just political solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and the Madrid principle of land for peace.

Therefore, we shall continue to look to the international community for its support in upholding international law to relieve the current humanitarian crisis and for the ultimate realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Despite the difficulties we encounter, we continue to strongly believe in the important role to be played by the international community in promoting calm and stability, addressing the humanitarian situation and advancing the peace process. That collective support, encouragement and commitment to principled positions based on international law strengthen our resolve as a people to realize our national rights and aspirations. That is why we shall continue to highly value the role of the Security Council as the principal United Nations organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. We shall continue to call on the Council to actively carry out its duties and its own resolutions on the question of Palestine until a just, lasting and comprehensive peace is achieved.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his informative briefing.

In the absence of the President, I would like to point out that the growing instability and dangers to international peace and security in Lebanon, particularly those posed by Hizbullah in the areas south of the Litani River, are more severe today than ever before. The two Katyusha rockets fired on northern Israel on 8 January and the terrorist attack that wounded two Irish peacekeepers on the same day are mere by two examples.

While Israel welcomed the Council's statement to the press condemning those terrorist attacks, much more needs to be done to implement resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety.

Weapons continue to pass through the porous Syrian-Lebanese border, in violation of the arms embargo. Moreover, some of those weapons are destined for areas south of the Litani River, where a re-armed Hizbullah maintains a presence.

Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hizbullah on 12 July 2006, are still being held, without any sign of life or visits by the Red Cross. Resolution 1701 (2006) is explicit in its call for the immediate and unconditional release of the Israeli soldiers. I call on the Council, as I have done before, to implement those provisions and help to bring our boys home without delay.

Lastly, the incident on 7 January in the Halta area, when a Lebanese crossed into Israel, is a reminder of the need to demarcate the Blue Line. While Israel returned the suspect to Lebanon after a short investigation, we hope that marking the Blue Line, as well as placing warning signs, will prevent future incidents.

Let me now turn to the situation with Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the peace process with the moderate Palestinian Authority leadership. The ugly face of Palestinian terrorism — the relentless, vicious and horrifying acts of violence directed at Israelis simply because they are Israelis — is the greatest humanitarian crisis and threat to human rights and peace and stability in our region. Israel calls on the moderate Palestinian Authority leadership to shoulder its responsibilities under the various agreements, including the Road Map, and put an end to the violence and terrorism and to the incitement to commit such acts against our people.

The events of last week demonstrate just how terrorism not only endangers and threatens civilian lives but also places the entire peace process in grave peril. Last Thursday evening, two armed Palestinian terrorists infiltrated Kfar Etzion in the West Bank and wounded three Israelis. In another incident that occurred at around the same time, Palestinian terrorists opened fire on Israeli police officers stationed near the Shoafat refugee camp in Jerusalem, killing a police officer and wounding another.

While those acts of terrorism took place, over 230,000 Israelis have continued to live within range of Palestinian rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. Since Hamas came to power, more than 4,200 rockets and mortar rounds have been fired at Israel's southern cities and towns. Within that group, the city of Sderot has sustained the majority of the rocket attacks — with astonishing courage but also tremendous pain and suffering.

Sderot — as a British journalist covering the region has said — is a city that measures life in 15-second intervals. Fifteen seconds: that is all the time that the people of Sderot have between the sounding of the red-alert warning siren and the inevitable crash and explosion of Qassam rockets. There is no normal life in Sderot. Everyone is on edge, fearful of leaving their homes, terrified of dropping their children off at schools and kindergartens and frightened even to go to the supermarket. That terrifying version of "Russian roulette" — and I assure the Council that it is not a game — has been given that name because no one knows when the next rocket will be fired or where it will land and it is a source of tremendous terror.

Hamas directs its terrorist campaign from the Gaza Strip, where it violently seized control last year, in order to menace, maim and murder innocent civilians. Two weeks ago, a Hamas sniper murdered a 20-year-old volunteer from Ecuador, Mr. Carlos Chávez, in the fields of Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha. Not only does Hamas fire rockets indiscriminately, they now also target civilians with precision weapons.

I remind the Council that Israel disengaged from the Gaza Strip more than two years ago in the hope that the Palestinians would govern the area responsibly — looking after their own people and improving the standard of living and the quality of life. Instead, the Palestinians turned Gaza into a terror base and a launching pad for missiles against Israel.

My Palestinian colleague has continued — unashamedly or because he is uninformed — to repeatedly refer to Israel as the occupying Power, blatantly ignoring the fact that Israel did indeed leave Gaza totally over two years ago. The only occupying Power in Gaza is the terrorist occupation of Hamas, which keeps not just Israelis but also its own people hostage to its terror and violence.

Very characteristically, the Palestinian Observer has yet again used the word "occupation", this time 13 times. He did not use the word "Hamas" even once. He should remember that this is the real world. This is the Security Council. This is not theatre.

While those acts of terrorism have been taking place, Israelis live in constant fear and danger. My Government has been clear — in words and in deeds — that it will do everything possible to prevent a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. The flow of electricity to Gaza is continuing, meeting at least three quarters of Gaza's electricity needs. Supplies including cooking gas, 500,000 litres of diesel fuel for generators — primarily for hospitals — 2.2 million litres of industrial fuel for power plants and 50 truckloads of humanitarian aid have all entered the Gaza Strip since last week. Israel works closely with the relevant United Nations and humanitarian agencies on the ground to ensure that the needs of the civilian population are met.

In contrast, what can be said of Hamas's commitment to Gaza's humanitarian needs? Hamas diverts the fuel supply that is being sent in to produce domestic power. It keeps the Gaza population in the dark, so that it can manufacture more rockets to fire at Israel. By firing on border crossings, the terrorists cynically force closures, which hamper efforts to deliver humanitarian aid. Recently, we even saw humanitarian convoys being used by Hamas to smuggle explosives and weapons into Gaza. Hamas stages images of misery in its ongoing manipulation of the media, making Gaza not only its theatre of operations but also a theatre of disinformation.

Hamas does not have the word humanitarian in its vocabulary. As noted in Under-Secretary-General Pascoe's briefing last week, more than 20 months have passed since the kidnapping of Corporal Gilad Shalit, whose whereabouts and condition remain unknown. The terrorists holding him will not allow any visits to assess his well-being. That is the real ongoing humanitarian crisis.

On several occasions, my delegation has stressed that terrorists are dependent on States for support and assistance. Syria is home and headquarters to numerous terrorist organizations, including Islamic Jihad and Hamas. The political leader of the latter, Khaled Mashal, lives there while continuing to orchestrate the killing of Israelis.

Iran also funds Hamas and Hizbullah and generously supports terrorism elsewhere around the globe. Iran uses Holocaust denial and threatens to destroy Israel to promote its utterly racist worldview. Iran cannot live in a world where there is a Jewish State, and so it bankrolls terrorists on the ground to do its dirty work. It must be stopped, and I sincerely hope this Council will make sure that it is. Speaking before a televised audience only yesterday evening, the Iranian President reiterated his belligerent threats against Israel, saying "The life of Zionists will sooner or later come to an end". Surely, such inflammatory and inciting rhetoric shakes every one of us to the very core.

But it is all the more alarming as the Iranian President's remarks come only one day after the United Nations observed international Holocaust remembrance day, a solemn occasion when the international community reaffirmed its resolve to preserve the eternal memory of the Holocaust and to utilize the instruments of human rights and civic responsibility to ensure that genocide never again occurs anywhere.

During a week in which the nations of the world have come together to remember the victims of the Holocaust and perhaps the greatest example of the perversion of civic power, it is appropriate to recall how the extremists seek to undo those efforts. Hamas and Hizbullah are undemocratic parties that use the instruments of civil society to achieve their own racist, hateful and violent agenda. They manipulate and misuse democracy and human rights to promote instability and chaos.

The international community must not be fooled. It must know that Hamas is the enemy of everything the United Nations stands for. Hamas does not represent the will of the Palestinian people, but rather the will of the extremists who seek to undermine everything we have worked for. An unfettered Hamas in power is nothing less than civilization in retreat.

The urgency of the need to realize that terrorists seek to undermine our democracies and destroy our human rights was underscored recently by the recent statement of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement on the situation in the Gaza Strip. In seeking a purely political condemnation of Israel, the Non-Aligned Movement's statement makes no mention of Palestinian terrorism or Hamas, let alone Hamas' indiscriminate and vicious rocket attacks against Israel. In essence, it fails to reflect an understanding of the reality on the ground and the overall responsibility of this Council. How ignorant or cynical can even the Non-Aligned Movement get? As the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said, what

indeed is the Non-Aligned Movement non-aligned about? Is it even relevant today?

We believe in continued dialogue, as ongoing today between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. That means, however, taking a balanced and fair approach to the conflict and not promoting biased narratives. We recently saw the harmful effects of one-sided rhetoric in the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Clearly, such initiatives do not benefit peace or human rights. If anything, they threaten the possibility of reconciliation and reaching an agreement.

Darkness has fallen over Gaza, but it is not a darkness that stems from the absence of physical light. The darkness over Gaza is the result of darkness imposed by the extremists in Tehran and Damascus, whose terrorist proxies on the ground, Hamas and Hizbullah, want nothing less than to extinguish all progress, development, hope and light. The light of hope in Gaza can be turned on in an instant. The situation can change dramatically in a millisecond. All it takes is for the rockets to stop and for terror to cease.

Thankfully, the moderates in the region are hard at work to counteract the extremists. Israel went to Annapolis last November to bring the light and spirit of peace back to all people in the region. Israel is committed to the vision of two States — one Jewish and one Palestinian — living side by side in peace and security, as the ongoing dialogue between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas demonstrates. We are committed to seeing moderate Arab and Muslim States in the region support the process between us and the Palestinians. Stagnation is neither our policy nor our interest. Israel believes that an independent Palestinian State that desires to live in peace as our next-door neighbour is vital to realizing sustainable peace and security in the region.

But the moderates must work together. Undercutting each other and pointing fingers will only undermine our collective strength. Siding with the terrorists gives them no incentive to reform and end the violence. Each of our roles here is important. With a precise understanding of those roles, Israel hopes that we can achieve a lasting peace for all citizens of the Middle East in our time.

Sir John Sawers (United Kingdom): I would like to begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing to the Council, the second on the situation in the Middle East in just over a week.

As we have heard, the Israelis and the Palestinians continue to hold high-level bilateral negotiations. Mr. Olmert and President Abbas met again as recently as 27 January. We see those regular contacts as a demonstration of the political determination of the two leaders. That is invaluable, especially when events on the ground threaten to derail the peace process. We commend both men for their political leadership and encourage them and their Governments to continue.

We in the international community have a responsibility to do whatever we can to support the Israeli-Palestinian process, a process that has the agreed goal of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel, with both countries enjoying peace and security. I am not sure whether debates such as this, which generate more heat than light, are a useful contribution to that process. But for our part, the British Government will continue to offer political and practical support to both the Israelis and Palestinians involved. One example of that is the United Kingdom's co-sponsorship of the private investors' conference to be held later this year in Bethlehem, as part of our commitment to work with others to help develop a Palestinian economy supported by the private sector.

We cannot be sanguine. Annapolis launched the peace process, and now we must make continuous, steady progress to our goal. It is not evident that the parties are yet achieving that.

The situation in Gaza continues to be of serious concern to my delegation. The Security Council held extensive discussions on that over the past week, during which I made clear the United Kingdom's concern and my Government's position. We condemn the near daily rocket attacks out of Gaza, targeted at Israeli civilians, and we recognize that Israel has a right to self-defence against such attacks. But the closing of all crossings and restriction of the supply of fuel, food and other goods in order to create suffering among the civilian population is not the right response. We welcome the decision of the Israeli Government to resume fuel and food supplies to Gaza, and the Palestinians must address Israel's security concerns and put an end to the launching of rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza against Israel.

I would like to express my Government's concern over the situation at Rafah and our support for the Egyptian Government's response. We welcome Prime Minister Fayyad's proposal that the Palestinian Authority take control of the Palestinian side of the Gaza crossings. I encourage all concerned to work, as a matter of urgency, for the normal operation of the crossings. We in the European Union have made clear that we stand ready to play our part at Rafah once conditions allow.

On Lebanon, I would like to recall the press statement that you, Sir, issued yesterday on behalf of members of the Council. The United Kingdom is alarmed by the deteriorating security situation in Lebanon. We have witnessed the roadside bombs that killed Brigadier General François al-Hajj and Captain Wissam Eid. We witnessed the roadside attacks against cars belonging to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United States embassy, and the Katyusha rockets that were fired from southern Lebanon into northern Israel. We condemn all such terrorist attacks. We were also disturbed by the civil unrest on 27 January, in which a number of demonstrators were killed.

It remains essential that political divisions be reconciled and that the election of a president be allowed to proceed without outside interference. We welcome the recent efforts of the League of Arab States and we look to all those with influence to use it responsibly and for the common good of all Lebanese.

The United Nations has an important role to play in achieving the just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East that we all seek — first, as a member of the Quartet; secondly, through UNIFIL and other United Nations operations; thirdly, as a provider of humanitarian aid through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; and fourthly, as a facilitator of progress. The United Nations voice should be heard, and the Security Council should play its part. To do that, we must ensure that our discussion adds value and is seen to support progress towards our common goal: a comprehensive peace in the region.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his very comprehensive briefing, which provided a most sombre picture of the situation in the Middle East.

I wish first to say a few words on Lebanon, where the situation is of grave concern to us and should be the full focus of the Council's attention. We firmly condemn the assassinations and attempted assassinations in that country since October 2004 and deplore the considerable deterioration in the security situation in recent months. In a genuine campaign of destabilization, four new attacks have been carried out since the end of Emil Lahoud's mandate. Following the assassination of the army's chief of operations on 12 December, another critical institution in preserving Lebanese stability was crippled by the murderous attack of 25 January against an officer of the internal security forces. On 15 December, a diplomatic vehicle was attacked for the first time in three years. In mid-January, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon was hit. We reiterate our full support for the United Nations Force, which is doing outstanding stabilization work in difficult conditions in southern Lebanon.

As the Security Council recalled yesterday, it is extremely important that the perpetrators and instigators of those crimes be brought to justice and that impunity finally be brought to an end in Lebanon. My delegation reiterates its support for the efforts of the Secretary-General to establish a special court as soon as possible, in accordance with Council resolution 1757 (2007).

My delegation has followed this weekend's developments with concern, and mourns the victims of events in Beirut. Those responsible must be found, and everything should be done to shed light on the circumstances behind those events. Such growing instability is even more disturbing given the ongoing political stalemate and the vacuum at the head of the Lebanese State. My delegation naturally notes that the priority must be, now more than ever, an end to that political impasse and hence, first and foremost, the convening of presidential elections without delay in accordance with Lebanese constitutional law and with the broadest possible inclusiveness. In that respect, France fully supports the initiative of the League of Arab States and the efforts of its Secretary-General. France is fully prepared in its ongoing commitment to welcome a resolution to the crisis in Lebanon along the lines the Arab League's plan.

In the context of the most disturbing security and political situation, the international community must show its determination to act to ensure the full implementation of Security Council resolutions so as to guarantee the sovereignty, stability, unity and independence of Lebanon. My delegation reiterates, as did the European Union two days ago, its full support

for the legitimate Government of Lebanon, its armed forces and security forces in their efforts to maintain stability in the country. The international community must call on the parties within and outside Lebanon to assume their responsibilities immediately and to respect their commitments.

I now turn to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. For several days, the Council sought to draft a consensus text on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and the increased violence there and in southern Israel. Unfortunately, despite all our hard work we were unable adopt a presidential statement. That is even more regrettable given that the Council was very close to an agreement that would have enabled it to respond to the gravity of the situation and, for the first time, to condemn the growing violence, in particular the terrorist rocket attacks on Israel, which have increased considerably since Hamas won control of Gaza.

France will continue to strive to ensure that the Security Council can play its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are encouraged by the openness shown by all delegations and hope to continue along those lines. Our efforts should focus first on an objective and complete understanding of realities in that part of the world. That is a prerequisite to an effective response from the Council. As has been broadly demonstrated here, the reality is that there has been an unacceptable increase in violence in Gaza, which we condemn in all its forms. We have therefore called firmly for an end to the mortar and rocket fire that threatens Israeli civilians in southern Israel every day. No State would accept such terrorist attacks against its civilians without having recourse to its legitimate right to self-defence. At the same time, that right should not be exercised to excess. We call on the authorities to show the greatest restraint in implementing that right and fully to respect international law so as to avoid further harm to the civilian population.

France is also concerned by the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Despite the admirable work undertaken by United Nations agencies and humanitarian workers, the situation has deteriorated significantly in recent days and led to current events along the Egyptian border. Once again, that is a reality that we cannot and must not ignore. France believes that measures, such as electricity cuts, to effectuate a blockade of Gaza are tantamount to the collective punishment of the entire civilian population. France deplores such measures and calls for the immediate restoration of all fuel deliveries and the resumption of essential services. In that respect, we note the recent statements made by the Government of Israel, as recalled by Ambassador Gillerman, that it will do its utmost to ensure the humanitarian needs of all civilians.

Alongside our partners in the European Union, we again reiterate our call for the removal of all obstacles to humanitarian activities, primarily by the opening of crossing points to the movement of goods and persons. In that respect, I stress the support expressed by the entire European Union for the proposal, as recalled by Ambassador Mansour, that the Palestinian Authority monitor those crossings itself. In general, we call for strict respect for international law, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights law.

As to the situation on the border with Egypt, France welcomes the Egyptian Government's efforts. We express our readiness, alongside our partners in the European Union, to contribute to stabilizing the situation within the framework of an agreement between the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Israel. Speaking of Gaza, we stress the need for increased confidence on the ground. If the Annapolis dynamic is to be maintained, the Israeli and Palestinian peoples must see positive developments in their daily lives. Unfortunately, we have only seen the situation worsen in the meantime.

Beyond Gaza, the parties must fulfil their commitment to implementing phase I of the road map forthwith. We all recognize what is at stake on the ground. Israel must do more with regard to releasing prisoners and gradually lifting restrictions in the West Bank. Israel must stop constructing new settlements and dismantle outposts. In that regard, as noted by the ministers of the European Union on 28 January, we are disturbed by recent settlement activities, in particular recent bids for new construction in Har Homa. On their side, the Palestinians must increase their efforts for security and the fight against terrorism.

With the European Union, especially in the framework of the Quartet, we will provide all support required to the American authorities in their task of supervising the implementation by the parties of their obligations and commitments, as recalled at Annapolis. We must now remember that the parties themselves

outlined that agreement at Annapolis. It envisages the conclusion of an agreement on the creation of a democratic, viable Palestinian State living in peace and security next to Israel by the end of 2008. We are committed to that objective.

First we must support both parties in their negotiations on substantive issues, which have begun recently. The Palestinians and the Israelis must show boldness and creativity to find the way to a settlement.

We also believe it is essential to continue to provide political and financial support for the Government of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayad and their vision for a future Palestinian State. Specifically, that means that the strong signal sent during the international donors' conference on the Palestinian State, held in Paris on 17 December, should become a reality. Eighty-seven countries and international organizations committed themselves to providing some $7.7 billion to support reconstruction and economic recovery. We will continue our efforts along those lines.

Mr. Pascoe recently recalled that our Minister met with the co-chairmen of the Paris conference to work on the implementation of that conference. That meeting made it possible to recognize that in order to improve the Palestinian economy, the donors must fulfil their pledges as soon as possible, especially with regard to budget matters, in 2008. The Palestinian Authority must also rapidly implement the reform plan it has announced. Finally, Israel must ensure improved movement of goods and people, which, as the IMF and the World Bank have emphasized, is a requirement for economic recovery.

We recognize the complexities and difficulties in the Middle East. France will do everything possible to help regional actors take every possible opportunity to progress along the path to peace. We are convinced that we have the pressing duty to refuse the suicide option of giving up.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening an open session today, and we also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing.

My Government was represented at the Annapolis meeting last November. We had welcomed the initiative of the United Sates for convening the conference which, for the first time, brought together many countries keen to support the peace process in the Middle East. We also welcomed the Joint Understanding reached by the parties. More importantly, we commended the efforts by the parties, Palestine and Israel, who bear the primary responsibility for achieving peace.

We are particularly pleased that, in accordance with the understandings reached at Annapolis, Palestinian Chief Negotiator Ahmad Qurei and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni have begun meeting to discuss core issues. The resumption of direct negotiations will hopefully lead to a definitive settlement of the sixty-year-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the foreseeable future. Experience has shown that successful conflict resolution has as its basis the willingness of the parties to negotiate without preconditions. Despite the violence and despair that threatens peaceful change in conflict situations, our belief is that the only alternative is an inclusive negotiated solution.

We are, however, deeply concerned that while there is an attempt to begin the process of resolving final status issues, Israel continues its illegal settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, despite its stated commitment at the Annapolis Conference to stop building settlements in the West Bank. The planned expansion of the Har Homa settlement not only expands illegal settlements but also predetermines a solution to the future of Jerusalem. The existing network of hundreds of illegal settlements, military posts, checkpoints and the separation wall already undermine the prospects of achieving a viable and contiguous Palestinian State and is in clear violation of United Nations resolutions and the Road Map.

The situation in occupied Palestine, in particular Gaza, cannot be ignored any longer. Try as it might, this Security Council cannot remain silent and hope that the situation in Gaza will change as time goes by, when 1.5 million residents are left without water, electricity and basic sewage systems. We have to remember that the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, has a special responsibility in supporting a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the Middle East.

Allow me to digress and say that my neighbour, Ambassador Sawers of the United Kingdom, raised an important issue about whether such meeting formats are helpful, whether they throw more light or more

heat on the situation. I know for a fact that my delegation believes that silence on the situation in the Middle East is more dangerous than even meetings where temperatures and heat might be raised. In fact, we would have preferred a meeting where all Member States could come and speak on this issue, because we do not believe that the issue at hand belongs only to fifteen Member States and four other invited Member States.

Already yesterday, the Office of the Special Coordinator Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in Jerusalem reported that all crossings into Gaza from Israel remain closed, except for fuel imports. This, of course, contradicts the intentions expressed by Israel to ease the border blockade. We learned today from Ambassador Gillerman that about 50 trucks have gone in, but Mr. Pascoe just indicated that there is a backlog of 224 trucks. That is why we believe this issue must always be discussed.

My delegation wishes to reiterate that the pursuit of peace must mean that neither side creates conditions that would undermine possible confidence-building measures. Any process to find a peaceful solution should also translate into parallel progress on the ground. The continuing occupation undermines the credibility of the peace process.

South Africa is on record as supporting a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing alongside the State of Israel, with both States enjoying secure borders. A Palestinian State will require an adequate physical and services infrastructure along with sufficient financial resources, if it is to function effectively and to successfully address the extensive needs of the Palestinian people. South Africa remains ready to assist concretely in this regard, despite its own considerable development challenges.

At the recent Paris pledging conference on Palestine, the South African Government announced that it will donate $1 million per annum for capacity-building and humanitarian assistance in Palestine over the next three years. It has also agreed with its partners within the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum to provide an additional $1million per year from IBSA funds for the same purposes over the same period.

The international community has the duty to assist and support the parties to reach a settlement and also to ensure that political progress is coupled with a change for the better in the lives of Palestinians and Israelis. In this regard, we commend previous regional and international efforts to take the peace process forward, including the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. The United Nations, the Security Council in particular, has an obligation to remain committed to assist the respective parties in their quest for a lasting peace.

My delegation also wishes to reiterate and recall all Security Council resolutions on this matter, in particular resolution 338 (1973), for the parties to work towards a just and durable peace. Only through a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East that addresses the Syrian and Lebanese tracks as well would this just and durable peace prevail.

In conclusion, my delegation takes note of the recent agreement reached by the Arab Foreign Ministers on the composition of the Lebanese National Unity Government. However, we remain concerned by the endless violence plaguing Lebanon. We reiterate the Council's call for inclusive political dialogue in order to foster the unity of all the Lebanese people.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Pascoe, for his substantive briefing on the situation in the Middle East. We share the deep concern over developments in and around Gaza. We firmly condemn both rocket firing against towns in southern Israel and the blockade of Gaza that causes the deep suffering of its peaceful inhabitants. Such methods are unacceptable.

To overcome differences between Palestinians and Israelis, there is a need for resolve and political will. That is the only way to curb violence and terrorism and deal with the problems of Jerusalem, borders and refugees, and to approach the ultimate aim, which is the coexistence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace and security.

Contacts on these issues were recently relaunched in Annapolis. Hopes emerged for progress in a Palestinian-Israeli settlement. Now, however, after the developments of recent days in and around Gaza, the positive momentum is in jeopardy.

We continue to believe that Israelis and Palestinians need to agree among themselves. Russia supports any agreements from them if they are in keeping with the fundamental elements of the international legal basis for the settlement.

What is particularly important is outside support for the negotiations. Collective methods for work within the framework of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, working in close contact with the League of Arab States, have demonstrated how effective it is.

Moving forward requires that Israelis and Palestinians clearly fulfil their obligations under the road map and avoid additional impediments towards a settlement. The crisis in Gaza erodes the atmosphere of mutual trust, and we cannot help but be concerned by this erosion.

We are continuing to steadfastly advocate resumption of inter-Palestinian negotiations on the restoration of national unity. We support and welcome the efforts of all those regional parties, especially the President of Egypt, Mr. Hosni Mubarak, who are working on relaunching contacts between the leading factions of Palestine, Fatah and Hamas. It is important that the initiative of the President of Egypt also be supported by all members of the League of Arab States.

Russia closely followed the recent trip of President Bush to the Middle East, which Mr. Pascoe referred to. The fact that the United States has energetically taken up the problem of a settlement in the region is a necessary signal for all participants in the negotiation process. Such an intent can only be welcomed, particularly when it is continuously linked to the activities of the Quartet. For its part, the Russian Federation, within the Quartet and in working with the parties, is making a practical contribution to addressing the issues of achieving a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement.

The Middle East was again visited by a special envoy of the President of Russia, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Saltanov, who had contacts with the leadership of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Intensive contacts are held daily on Middle East issues by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Mr. Sergei Lavrov.

We continue to advocate our proposal to hold in Moscow a new representative meeting on a settlement in the Middle East. For us, what is important is not the meeting itself, but the outcomes of such a forum. The event being planned calls for serious preliminary preparation and commensurate efforts by the parties. Participants are also asked to strive to successfully hold the next substantive phase of negotiations.

Our view is that the path to a settlement lies in resumption of the negotiation process on all tracks — Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese. It is only through a comprehensive approach that we can bring peace and stability to the peoples of the Middle East region.

Today, one cannot fail to take up the issue of the latest heightening of tensions in Lebanon. Terrorist acts and unrest in the streets of the capital, against the backdrop of the prolonged political crisis and the ongoing stalemate in the election of the president, are of deep concern. At this dangerous point in time, we call upon all Lebanese political leaders to display not only restraint and calm, but also an understanding of their responsibilities to the people of Lebanon and to the international community. It is important to avert further escalation and to seek a solution to all disputed issues through dialogue within the constitutional framework.

In the current tense situation, implementation of the League of Arab States initiative on the interim Lebanese settlement is even more relevant. It provides for, as a first step, prompt election of a consensus president of the country. Russia will continue to support this approach, working together will all leading political forces in Lebanon.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I would like to thank you for convening this meeting and Mr. Pascoe for briefing us. I would also like to thank the representative of the Palestinian State and the Permanent Representative of Israel for the statements they made. They added their own assessments and gave us a small sample of the obstacles and the difficulties we have yet to overcome.

Although this is Costa Rica's third term of membership in the Security Council, it is the first time that we are taking part in a debate on the Middle East, an item that has been on the Council's agenda since 24 February 1948. It therefore seems appropriate to me to sum up, in a few words, our vision for peace in the Middle East from the United Nations perspective and from the perspective of the Security Council.

Our vision began to take shape when we voted on General Assembly resolution 181 (II) on 29 November 1947. On that day, along with 32 other nations, we supported the independence of Palestine and the partition of its lands into two States. We proposed delimiting the borders, supported provisions for the economic union and committed ourselves to supporting membership of both States in the United Nations.

Today, a little more than six decades later, we are still prepared to promote the idea of two States that live in peace, respect their differences, promote the enjoyment of human rights for their populations and cooperate in the promotion of their well-being.

Accordingly, we understand our service in the Security Council as a great opportunity to support any efforts that may lead, finally, to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

However, we are duty-bound to note that the road to peace and the desired coexistence is full of obstacles. In recent weeks and months, from Annapolis to Gaza, we have seen hope re-emerge yet again, only to disappear in the face of violence and humanitarian drama. This story is nothing new. It is the interminable repetition of the trauma that has dashed the hopes of generations of Palestinians and Israelis. It is the eternal history of lost opportunities.

One might believe that those are distant and foreign realities for us Central Americans. That is not true. Less than two decades ago in Central America, blood was shed, and it was shed for the same reasons that it continues to be shed in Israel and Palestine. In Central America, as in Palestine and in Israel, others provided the weapons and we provided the dead.

When one looks at the history of the past six decades in the Middle East, one clearly sees interference by foreign interests, which have prevented the Palestinians and the Israelis from peacefully resolving their differences. Only open interference by foreign interests could explain why it will take still more time for Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to fulfil the commitment that they undertook a few weeks ago when they expressed their "determination to bring an end to bloodshed, suffering and decades of conflict between our peoples, to usher in a new era of peace based on freedom, security, justice, dignity, respect and mutual recognition".

Perhaps because this drama is not foreign to us — because we also killed one another for others' interests — we understand this tragedy. It took us time, as it has taken time in the Middle East, to understand that the solution lay with ourselves. Just like them, we had to experience pain to finally understand that it takes more courage to agree than it does to disagree. We understood, again with pain, that it is easier to erect walls than to build bridges.

Today, however, we have faith. We believe that, at last, men like Mahmoud Abbas and Ehud Olmert are good omens for a better life for Palestinians and Israelis. They must set out on the path undertaken much earlier by Itzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat. They must build peace on so much pain — which is often the most fertile ground where hope can flourish.

The international community, particularly the Security Council, has a fundamental role to play. But to carry out that mission, the Council must also overcome its own contradictions. For Costa Rica, it is regrettable that the humanitarian tragedy of Gaza and the terrorist attacks on populations in southern Israel have occurred amid the silence of the Council. If we do not overcome our own differences and set aside our particular interests, we cannot play the role that those who yearn to live in peace call on us to play. The Security Council in particular must finally move foreign interests away from Palestinians and Israelis and ensure respect for the goodwill born in Oslo and reaffirmed many times already.

What we need to do now, from our perspective, is to advocate a comprehensive approach in the negotiations and to abandon plans for successive negotiation phases. We need to leave behind approaches requiring that one phase be exhausted before the next can begin. These phased negotiation schemes have been the trap in which hope has often been imprisoned. What we must do now is address core issues, as Olmert and Abbas agreed in Annapolis when they expressed their determination to "launch bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty to resolve all remaining issues, including core issues, without exception".

We note with satisfaction the resolve of Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas. We welcome the fact that, in the gloomy atmosphere of the past two weeks, they mustered the determination to have a conversation last Sunday. Their generosity should lead to final negotiations. It is no longer possible to delay negotiations on the borders and the settlements, the issue of refugees and their compensation and their right of return and, in addition, the status of the city of Jerusalem. The vision of a final agreement will undoubtedly be an element that will strengthen the work of those who are fighting for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The Security Council must ensure conditions that enable the Israelis and the Palestinians to take their fate into their own hands, without interference by those who wish to stir up the conflict so that hatred and intolerance will prevail. Once we have ensured Palestinian and Israeli ownership of the process, the international community and this Council must also facilitate final negotiations on core issues and guarantee a framework of respect for its decisions.

Finally, we are concerned about the situation in Lebanon, where a situation of daily violence is continuing and intolerance has also taken root. Costa Rica rejects terrorist violence and welcomes the fact that, at least in this case, the Security Council has reached the consensus necessary to condemn that violence. We are confident in the integrity and unity of the Lebanese people so that normalcy will return to their political and institutional life and peace will return to the country's inhabitants.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I should like to thank the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing and to thank the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their presentations. We must acknowledge that the information that they have given us today is alarming and disturbing.

As we stated at last month's meeting on the Middle East, Panama was optimistic about the holding of the Annapolis Conference as a new beginning in the peace process. However, the recent high-level meetings between Israel and the Palestinian Authority have been taking place in an atmosphere not conducive to a peace agreement. In a supposed reaction to the rocket attacks from Gaza against its territory, Israel has responded in an unprecedented and excessive manner, in contravention of every norm of international law, and has instituted a humanitarian blockade against the population that threatens the lives of innocent civilians and destabilizes the region still further. That is hampering and jeopardizing the continuity and productivity of the negotiations and threatening the understanding that the parties reached together in Annapolis.

Amid all this, the Security Council remains removed from the issue, as demonstrated by last week's long and fruitless negotiations to agree on a statement regarding the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. As a result, a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, although it must be an agreement between the parties, requires more than ever before the leadership of the international community. It, and particularly the members of the Quartet, must find innovative ways to urge the parties to make the difficult decisions necessary for a final peace agreement between them.

I wish to take this opportunity to comment on references made by both the representative of the United Kingdom and the representative of South Africa regarding the purposes and contents of these meetings.

In Panama's opinion, the Security Council is not the principal forum for Member States to express their views on various issues affecting the international community. That forum is the General Assembly. Unfortunately, in many instances, it does not meet the responsibilities assigned to it. The Security Council is charged with maintaining international peace and security. The purpose of these public meetings should be to allow Member States to convey to the Council their vision of how to ensure peace and security.

Having attended 13 debates on the situation on the Middle East, I very much regret to say that I do not feel that these meetings have made an effective contribution to ensuring that the Council can act to maintain peace and security in the region. The Council's lamentable failure in recent days to agree on a presidential statement on the tragic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is clear proof of this situation.

Moreover, the protagonists in the peace process must also address the new dimensions that the conflict has taken on in recent years. For example, we must accept that there will not be comprehensive and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians unless there is Palestinian unity first and an end to extremist positions and terrorist bombings, regardless of their motives or where they emanate.

With regard to Lebanon, it is obvious that only an agreed solution between the Government and the opposition, free of external interference, can bring a peaceful end to the political stalemate in the country. That should be the goal of all the parties affected by that regrettable situation.

Mr. Verbeke (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

The Security Council is holding a second debate in a week on the situation in the Middle East. We spent numerous hours last week discussing a response to the latest developments in Gaza and southern Israel. We regret that repeated efforts to that end have been unsuccessful. However, the energy invested in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should not lead us to forget that the international community and the actors on the ground have a joint responsibility. Belgium believes that the role of the international community is to establish, on a priority basis, the most favourable environment to enable the parties to reach the peace agreement we have awaited for 60 years.

Despite reoccurring crises, we refuse to give in to pessimism, and the Annapolis Conference has given rise to a process replete with hopes that continue to be legitimate. In keeping with the joint statement adopted by President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert, those hopes have resulted in regular meetings and meetings between the lead negotiators and their teams of experts responsible for finding the compromises needed to reach a final status. Although the parameters for that status are already known — to wit, resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid principles and the Road Map — only the parties can legitimately finalize the terms.

Well aware that the success of those negotiations will also depend upon the political context and the socio-economic and humanitarian situation of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, the international community has undertaken to strengthen the negotiations. It has done so, first, through a robust commitment on the political and security fronts by the main protagonists. We therefore welcome the ongoing efforts of the United States with the parties. In that connection, we hope that the mission given to General Fraser will usefully complement the institutional role of the Quartet as regards monitoring the implementation of the Road Map. The European Union is also more involved than ever, in terms of diplomacy and its field missions. We also welcome the commitment of the League of Arab States in reiterating its peace initiative, participating at Annapolis and working with the Quartet.

The international community is also involved on the economic and humanitarian fronts through the work of Tony Blair as the Quartet's Representative, the €5 billion pledged at the Paris Conference in support of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's reform project and, just this week, the establishment of the European Commission's PEGASE mechanism for managing European Union socio-economic aid to Palestine, which is intended to channel international assistance to the Palestinian Authority.

That commitment will be meaningless, however, unless it is accompanied by accountability on the part of all protagonists on the ground to ensure that they meet the hopes of their peoples and dedicate themselves to providing them with a better future. The first duty of Israeli and Palestinian officials is to refrain from any measure that weakens the peace process. That duty is incumbent upon both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, as well as all other actors, in particular Hamas.

By refusing to clearly recognize Israel's right to exist, resuming the firing of terrorist rockets against civilians in Sderot and Ashkelom and rejecting the relaunching of the peace process at Annapolis, Hamas officials are continuing to fail to meet their responsibilities. By forcibly taking control of the Gaza Strip, they have weakened the institutions designed to be the basis for the State to which all Palestinians aspire. The necessary normalization of the situation on the border of the Gaza Strip provides an opportunity to demonstrate a sense of responsibility, which would above all benefit Palestinians, especially those living in Gaza. In that context, Belgium supports the efforts of Egyptian authorities and President Abbas to reopen border crossings under the monitoring of the Palestinian Authority, as well as the resumption of the flows of both commercial and humanitarian goods.

I would like to conclude by expressing my delegation's deep concern about the situation in Lebanon. Every announcement of a postponement of presidential elections — of which there have now been 13 — seriously heightens tensions and the risk of violent incidents such as those that broke out this past weekend. What is more disturbing is that, week after week, a campaign of terrorist attacks is attempting to destabilize the country by targeting the very institutions, and thereby the authority, of a State that we want to be sovereign, united and independent.

The history of Lebanon attests to the dangers of such a destructive policy. Belgium joins the numerous appeals of the Secretary-General calling for an immediate end to the violence. It is imperative that Lebanese officials meet the expectations placed upon

them. It is especially inconceivable that certain persons in Lebanon and elsewhere are continuing to hinder the election of a presidential candidate who has already been agreed through a compromise between the majority and the opposition and who would provide the best guarantee for neutrality and impartiality. In that connection, Belgium would like to express its unreserved support for the mediation efforts of the League of Arab States and Mr. Amr Moussa, its Secretary-General. He should continue with his efforts.

Mr. Spatafora (Italy): Allow me to join previous speakers in thanking Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his very exhaustive briefing and its clear-cut language, which once again gives us a clear picture of the situation on the ground and of where we stand on the political track, the way forward and the conditionalities. We fully share and support his concluding remarks in paragraphs 32 and 33 of his statement and his encouragement addressed to both parties, Prime Minister Olmert and President Abu Mazen.

We are deeply concerned by the evolution of the situation in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel, and we are very worried about its humanitarian repercussions. I think the clear-cut language, as I said before, of Under-Secretary-General Pascoe speaks for itself: grim realities, intensification of violence, and increased humanitarian suffering and violation of human rights. Those three points encapsulate what is going on and what we have to deal with.

We welcome, in principle, the decision by the Israeli authorities to suspend the blocking of the crossing. We will have to see it on the ground. We hope that the flow of goods across the border, and not only diesel fuel, will resume as quickly and effectively as possible for humanitarian and trade purposes. Also on that matter, we support Under-Secretary-General Pascoe's call on all parties to work urgently for a controlled re-opening of the crossing.

We firmly condemn the firing of rockets at Israel and recognize, certainly, Israel's right to self-defence, but we request that the consequences of those actions not be borne by innocent civilians. We believe, as I said before, that the decision to suspend or restrict the delivery of essential goods into Gaza is unsustainable and counterproductive.

It is imperative that there be an end to all violence and, above all, that the civilian population of both parties no longer be subject to indiscriminate attacks. We thus support the proposal for the Palestinian Authority to take control of the Palestinian side of the Gaza Strip crossing, and we support the resolution adopted by the League of Arab States in that regard. For that purpose, we would also like to resume the monitoring mission of the European Union at Rafah on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

We welcome the stance taken by the Egyptian Government in the peaceful and orderly management of the crisis underway, and we support the availability of the European Union to foster a solution in collaboration with Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

The evolution of the situation in the Gaza Strip should in no way slow down the dialogue underway, as Under-Secretary-General Pascoe stressed. There is a need for all parties to show the necessary consistency with the spirit of Annapolis. Most of all, it is important that the parties abstain from taking stances conflicting with the principles of the Road Map and that they do not send the wrong signal regarding their goodwill in pursuing the success of their bilateral dialogue. In particular, it is necessary for all the activities aimed at expanding the Israeli settlements in the West Bank to cease and for all of the illegal outposts to be dismantled, in accordance with the commitments undertaken in the Road Map. In addition, it is necessary for the freedom of movement and access of the Palestinians to be eased.

The international community is strongly committed to supporting the building of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State. The European Union has made a major commitment to that effort, including through the recent adoption — recalled by others, in particular my Belgian colleague, Mr. Verbeke — of the new mechanism for managing assistance to the Palestinian people.

Also, in the light of the complex situation on the ground, it is our hope that the Quartet's role in support of bilateral dialogue will be re-launched.

With regard to the situation in Lebanon, Italy categorically condemns the terrorist attack that took place in Beirut on 25 January, taking the life of the captain of the Lebanese internal security forces, Wissam Eid.

I would go on, but since I am taking the floor at this stage of the debate, I will limit myself to simply recalling and fully supporting what the French Permanent Representative, Mr. Ripert, has said. What he has said is what I would have said.

Allow me to conclude by saying that we would like to stress that we welcome the mediation efforts of the League of Arab States and we encourage its Secretary-General. We strongly support the Arab League's role in the search for a rapid solution to the political crisis. On the final point that was raised by Mr. Arias as a matter of principle, I think that it is an important point and provides food for thought, and it would be a mistake and shortsighted of us to dismiss it. I think he makes an important point about our mission and that of the General Assembly. We must think about that. Our credibility, that is, the credibility of the United Nations, depends on how we address those issues.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): First of all, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Building upon the momentum generated by the Arab Peace Initiative and the Annapolis conference, which were hailed by the international community as positive steps in the Middle East peace process, we have witnessed some encouraging developments. They include the renewed dialogue between Israel and Palestine on such core issues as the status of Jerusalem, the borders of a future Palestinian State, settlements in the West Bank, the return of refugees and security and water resources. The $7.4 billion pledged by countries and international organizations at the Paris donor conference to support the development of Palestine should also be mentioned, as should the commitment by the Government of Israel to freeze the construction of settlements in the occupied West Bank and release Palestinian prisoners and the commitments made by the Palestinian Authority to implement economic reforms, restore law and order and seize unlicensed weapons. With those developments and the scheduled Moscow conference, the Middle East peace process seemed to be moving in the right direction and promised progress.

Unfortunately, our new hopes were damaged by recent developments that involved new loss of life among Palestinian and Israeli civilians. I would like to refer to the statement by Mr. Pascoe, in which he described the past month as a month of bloodshed. There were also new tensions in the region, and, more seriously, a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, putting more than a million people in harm's way.

In that connection, the decision of the Security Council to hold, on 22 January 2008, an emergency debate on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip was necessary and timely.

We remain concerned about the worsening living conditions of the people on the ground and the cross-border influx of refugees to neighbouring countries, causing anxiety and uncertainty. My delegation once again emphasizes the need for the parties concerned to exercise restraint, respect international law, including international human rights and humanitarian law, and cease all acts of violence. We call upon Israel to put an end to all restrictions on the movement and business activities of people and to take steps to protect civilians and create safe conditions for the return of refugees, thus reducing tensions and helping to bring the Middle East peace process back on track.

A durable peace in the Middle East will only come with a lasting solution to the Israel-Palestine issue. The establishment of an independent Palestinian State that coexists in peace, side by side with Israel, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, taking into account the legitimate rights and interests of all parties concerned, remains the only viable solution. The real momentum for continued direct, substantive and peaceful negotiations along that line must be restored. The forthcoming Moscow conference can and should be exploited towards that end.

While commending the efforts undertaken by the League of Arab States and the Government of Lebanon in advancing the political process in the country, my delegation is deeply concerned about the volatile situation there, especially the 25 January 2008 bombing in Beirut and the repeated postponement of the presidential elections. We urge all parties concerned to search for compromise solutions to bring the country back to normalcy, thus contributing to regional peace and stability. Noting with great concern the recent tension in the Israel-Lebanon relationship, we urge the parties concerned to exercise restraint with a view to settling disputes through peaceful negotiations. We call for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), especially with regard to respect for Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial

integrity, and the protection of assets and livelihood of civilians.

In conclusion, let me once again express Viet Nam' s appreciation and support for the role of the Quartet, the League of Arab States, regional countries and the United Nations, especially the Security Council, in the quest for a lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East. We look forward to making our own contributions.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): We have concluded that the situation in the Middle East continues to be a source of serious threat to international peace and security. As a result, it requires the Security Council and the entire international community to exercise increased vigilance. In his very instructive briefing, Mr. Pascoe has reminded us of that sad conclusion, and my delegation thanks him.

For us, the tragedy in the Middle East is structured around a trilogy: the occupied territories, the role and responsibilities of the actors, and expectations. The impossibility of compromising or the refusal to do so lies at the core of the Middle East tragedy, particularly since the full restitution of territories occupied by Israel since 1967 continues to be in dispute with any real prospect of an early resolution because the settlement policy is being pursued unabated, in contravention of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003).

Given that situation, the protagonists on the southern and western fronts and at the Israeli-Syrian border have engaged in confrontation, giving rise to the blockade of Gaza and the ensuing humanitarian tragedy that, unfortunately and due to lack of agreement, our Council has been unable to condemn. Once again, my country, Burkina Faso, expresses its regret at that shirking of our responsibilities, which has left civilians to struggle on alone.

We call on Israel once again to fully lift the sanctions imposed on Gaza. We call on the Palestinian Authority to strive to end the military activities in Gaza. The stampede of Palestinians into Egypt following the blockade — which is certainly no gold rush but a rush for basic necessities — is a clear demonstration of the fact that the blockade has earned the description of "collective punishment".

In Lebanon, too, the unending political crisis marked by numerous terrorist attacks leads us to fear the worst. In such circumstances, the international community and the United Nations, while doing their utmost to help secure a settlement of the Middle East question, must hold the protagonists accountable. To be sure, hope for a lasting and viable solution cannot be entertained without them and the States of the region.

In that respect, we welcome the peace initiatives of the League of Arab States and the firm commitment of the Egyptian Government in its attempts to achieve a settlement to the conflict. All other initiatives in that area, particularly the Annapolis and Paris conferences, should be welcomed and fully supported. The momentum and spirit of goodwill that arose from those initiatives and from the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian that followed and that should continue despite the current challenges, are clearly a sign that all hope is not lost and that the peace process remains relevant. The Palestinians and Israelis need to understand that they, above all, are still the primary players with respect to peace. Their common history and shared destiny condemn them to that status.

A settlement will not take place without a modicum of compromise based on tolerance and mutual respect. One element that has been unanimously endorsed, including by those who formerly were irreconcilably skeptical — the vision of two independent States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and serenity — is no longer a delusion. It would seem that the commitment of the United Nations and the international community must help them to reach that goal as soon as possible.

Mr. Muharemi (Croatia): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing and candid description of the reality on the ground. It is regrettable to note that the picture has not substantively improved since his briefing last week, particularly with regard to the humanitarian indicators.

We have followed recent developments affecting Gaza and southern Israel with concern and alarm. Our delegation regrets that consensus on a presidential statement was not reached last week, despite significant effort. As our debates last week and today have shown, the pervading sense of deep concern about the humanitarian situation in Gaza is widely shared. As we have said before, we see all measures designed indiscriminately to target the civilian population as reprehensible and call for them to be brought into conformity with international humanitarian law.

We welcome the Israeli measures aimed at easing the humanitarian situation in Gaza. However, the continued closure of the crossings between Israel and Gaza is worrisome, particularly in view of the reports of rapidly diminishing food supplies and the growing backlog of United Nations agency relief trucks. We encourage all steps taken by Israel and the relevant agencies to find alternative solutions to that problem and to ensure humanitarian access.

Following the disquieting developments last week on the border between Gaza and Egypt, it is reassuring to know that efforts have been undertaken to find a peaceful and orderly solution to the recent disturbances. In that regard, we would like to express our support for the proposal by the Palestinian Authority that it assume responsibility for control of the Gaza crossings.

However, the situation in Gaza cannot be addressed in isolation from the context and the Israelis' right to self-defence. The continuing rocket attacks on Israeli soil, as well as all other activities that essentially target civilians, are unacceptable. We reiterate the call on all parties to immediately end all acts of violence. Furthermore, the situation should be addressed against the wider backdrop of the process started with the Annapolis conference. Annapolis reaffirmed the two-State solution and produced a joint understanding that aims at reaching a peace agreement before the end of 2008. Let me reiterate our full support for the goals agreed in Annapolis. We are encouraged by the sustained contacts between the parties and the beginning of the negotiations on all outstanding issues, including the final status issue. We hope the negotiations will lead to comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the Land for Peace principle, the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the previous agreements between the two parties.

The efforts of both parties should be commended as should the leadership of the United States. We are pleased to note the recent visit of President Bush to the region. Equally important is the continued engagement of the Arab States — their broad participation at the Annapolis conference was a promising sign. Furthermore, there is an active role to be played by the wider international community, notably in enhancing the governance capabilities of the Palestinian Authority and building a viable economy, as underscored by the Paris conference in December.

That said, we feel that hope for peace can be undermined by the lack of tangible improvements on the ground. This places the obligation on both sides to act with prudence, commitment and restraint. At this point, prominence should be given to the implementation of the respective obligations from the first phase of the Road Map, including the freeze on settlements, ensuring freedom of access and movement on the Israeli side, and ending violence, terrorism and incitement of violence on the Palestinian side.

Without underestimating the challenges, we appeal to the political courage of both sides to keep working towards the conclusion of the peace agreement before the end of this year, guided by the long-term interests of their peoples.

We are following the developments in Lebanon with concern. Yet another target date for the presidential elections has passed. We fear that with every delay, the risk of further destabilizing the fragile Lebanese society grows. We therefore welcome the mediation efforts of the Arab League.

The recent terrorist acts and unrest in Lebanon are very disturbing, with violence only adding fuel to the cycle of political crisis. We appeal to all sides to engage in an all-inclusive political dialogue and to work to preserve the sense of national unity.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): Let me begin by joining the previous speakers in thanking Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing on the current situation in the Middle East. This monthly consideration by the Security Council of the Middle East issue is taking place against developments that affect the daily lives of the peoples in the region, as well as the efforts to bring peace to the region.

Peace in the Middle East was given an impetus in Annapolis in November 2007, when Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas reached a historic joint understanding that outlines commitments from both sides for the resumption of peace negotiations. We remain confident that both leaders will do their utmost to realize the Annapolis goals. We are particularly encouraged that the parties have begun negotiations on core issues.

The continued support of the international community remains pertinent. The Paris donors conference is a commendable instance of such a

contribution by the international community. We welcome the progress that has been made as a follow-up to the Paris conference.

The Annapolis conference marked a new chapter in negotiated solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Its outcome provides a framework for concrete results, including a peace treaty between the two nations. However, the actual outcome of this on-going dialogue has yet to show clear movement in the direction of a solution to the conflict. Serious challenges clearly remain. Indeed, during this period the vicious cycle of violence has continued, in particular in the Gaza Strip. As Under-Secretary-General Pascoe noted, this month has been a month of heavy bloodshed.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is dire and unacceptable. The people of Gaza have been suffering not only from the closing of border crossings, but also from repeated military incursions by Israel. Unless it is addressed comprehensively, the situation in the Gaza Strip risks jeopardizing the promise that emerged at the Annapolis conference. We delved into the situation in Gaza extensively during the Council's open debate and follow-up consultations last week.

Today we wish to emphasize once again the importance of a common Council response to this unfolding humanitarian catastrophe. The Council cannot remain silent — that would indeed be a deafening silence. It is therefore a source of deep disappointment that despite serious and well-intentioned efforts, consensus has not been achieved. In the absence of such consensus, forums such as today's meeting are, in the view of my delegation, invaluable in providing the opportunity for views to be expressed.

We continue to believe that an inter-Palestinian dialogue is crucial to the success of the peace process. Dialogue is critical to moving the peace process forward, so as to build consensus and curb the violence that continues to erupt. With different sides advancing positions that sometimes oppose and contradict one another, deadlock characterizes the current political process and prevents progress. As we prepare to move forward with this process, we believe that it is imperative that efforts be made to facilitate dialogue among the Palestinian sides.

On Lebanon, we remain concerned over the continued political impasse that paralyzes the Government in the country. Lebanon's election of a new President has now been postponed 13 times. In a moment such as now, there is an urgent need not only for political consensus among contending factions, but also for breakthroughs that could end the political stalemate in the country. In this regard, Indonesia welcomes the efforts of the Arab League Secretary-General, Mr. Amr Moussa, in consulting with and encouraging various quarters in Lebanon to achieve unity and execute the presidential election. We recognize the importance of the three-point plan proposed by the League.

A presidential election must be realized in accordance with the Lebanese Constitution. Its continued postponement could cause harmful effects to the unity of the country. We believe that the process should be nationally owned; it should be done from, by and for the Lebanese. All parties concerned must now break the current impasse and build a consensus that leads to the election of a President.

The Middle East conflict has been so prolonged. The need to find a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the conflict is absolutely critical. The Government of Indonesia is committed to helping achieve an end to this protracted and bitter conflict, which has been wearing on the parties for far too long. In particular, our commitment and support for the Palestinian cause is total and unwavering. We hope that multilateral efforts, including by the Security Council, the Quartet and the Arab League, can maximize their full potential in contributing to the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on relevant resolutions of the Council, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of Land for Peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Li Junhua (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation thanks Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing.

On 22 January, the Security Council held an emergency meeting on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. All of the relevant parties expressed their deep concern. But over the past week, the situation did not change fundamentally for the better. China is deeply concerned with the situation and expresses its regret. The current difficult living conditions of civilians in Gaza are unacceptable.

We have noted that Prime Minister Olmert, in his meeting with President Abbas on 27 January, committed not to again cut off its food, medical and necessary energy supplies to Gaza and to make further efforts to avoid any outbreak of new humanitarian crises. It is our hope that the Israeli Government will effectively carry out its commitments and open all crossings to Gaza at an early date in order to ensure the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid.

The international community should also provide emergency humanitarian assistance to Palestine. In this regard, we express our appreciation for the efforts and contributions by relevant countries, especially those of Egypt. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is the most pressing issue at present in the Middle East, and it requires emergency measures to resolve it. Any delay will result in more human suffering.

The Palestinian National Authority made a proposal for controlling the crossings in Gaza. This plan is worthy of a positive response.

The crisis in Gaza has an extensive background and deep root causes. The only way to respond to the various challenges in the Middle East and to realize a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is for all parties involved conduct political negotiations, with the support of the international community. We welcome the negotiations process initiated at the Annapolis Conference, and we welcome the work done by the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, as well as their respective negotiation teams.

In order to ensure that the negotiations yield progress, Israel and Palestine should do away with various interferences and be more resolute in their resolve to push for negotiations, build up a broader consensus between them and make necessary compromises and concessions in negotiations. The international community should encourage and commend the negotiations conducted by the two parties and offer helpful support. To ensure that the negotiations are conducted smoothly, all the parties should make concerted efforts and create favourable conditions for them.

The international community should assist the Palestinian Authority in building a security forces mechanism and in accelerating its economic development. Efforts are also needed to push for a comprehensive ceasefire between Palestine and Israel so as to avoid any actions that may lead to the deterioration of the situation. Israel should also take bold measures in lifting its closure of Palestine and should dismantle the separation wall and settlements.

The Lebanese situation is at a crucial point. The presidential election has been delayed again and again, and the security situation is showing signs of deterioration. We hope that the Lebanese factions will proceed in the interests of national stability and solidarity and resolve their differences peacefully in seeking a common understanding. Not long ago, the League of Arab States put forward a proposal to settle the Lebanese political crisis. This proposal is worthy of the attention of all Lebanese parties and factions.

The year 2008 is crucial for achieving Middle East peace. New opportunities are accompanied by complex challenges. In order to ensure that 2008 will be a year of hope for the Middle East, all relevant parties must make concerted efforts, including the early realization of peace between Lebanon and Israel and between Syria and Israel. The negotiations between Lebanon and Israel and between Syria and Israel are an important component of the Middle East peace process. The early resumption of relevant negotiations and progress in this regard will help achieve comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

We believe that the peace process will not be smooth sailing, but as long as we stick to negotiations rather than resorting to force, and dialogue rather than confrontation, we will surely be able to open the gate to peace. We hope that all the relevant parties in the Middle East will make unremitting efforts in this regard.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): I would like to begin by joining others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing. We greatly appreciate the efforts of the United Nations and its specialized technical agencies in responding to the challenging situation in the region.

The troubling developments in Gaza and southern Israel will not discourage the commitment of the United States to President Bush's vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, and they should not discourage the Council from its commitment to the long-term goal of establishing a Palestinian State that is peaceful, democratic and viable.

Israel and the Palestinians are forging ahead with a political process launched at Annapolis, and the United States and other members of this Council and the Quartet must continue to support their efforts.

As President Bush said during his recent visit to Jerusalem, we are working to support progress on four tracks.

First, both sides need to fulfil their commitments under the Road Map, as the parties themselves reaffirmed at Annapolis. For the Israelis, that includes ending settlement expansion and removing unauthorized outposts. For the Palestinians, that includes confronting terrorists and dismantling their infrastructure.

Secondly, the Palestinians need to build their economy and political and security institutions with the help of Israel and the international community. Quartet Special Representative Tony Blair is making important progress on Palestinian economic reform and institution-building and has established good working relationships with Prime Minister Fayyad and Israeli Defence Minister Barak.

The third track is the international track. The international community has shown, both in Paris and in Annapolis, that it fully supports this effort. The United States appreciates the Arab Peace Initiative and believes that Arab States that are committed to regional peace should reach out to Israel.

Finally, the parties' bilateral negotiations are essential in establishing a peace settlement that ends the occupation that began in 1967. The only way to have a lasting peace is if both sides come together to make difficult choices and implement them to establish trust. The United States believes that President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert will make these choices, because both of them are committed to creating conditions of security and stability. It is our hope that their teams negotiate seriously and touch upon all the difficult core issues for them. United States envoys who were appointed to monitor and facilitate progress on the Road Map, to professionalize the security forces of the Palestinian Authority and to work with the parties and regional partners to develop some ideas for a security concept for a future Palestinian State are on the ground and engaged.

We also hope that the international community will undertake to maintain the momentum first generated in Annapolis, following agreement on Road Map implementation and subsequently reinforced in Paris, following commitments of financial support for Palestinian institution-building and economic reform.

We must all remain committed to the creation of a Palestinian State that is a homeland for the Palestinian people, just as Israel is a homeland for the Jewish people.

The United States shares the regret of other delegations that the Council was unable to reach a consensus on a presidential statement on the situation in Gaza and southern Israel. Let me be clear on this point. This lack of agreement on a text should not be understood as a lack of concern on the part of the Council about the humanitarian situation. The humanitarian needs of the Gazans must be met, and we will continue to be a lead bilateral provider of humanitarian aid to Palestinian suffering as a result of the illegal coup launched by Hamas against the legitimate institutions of the Palestinian Authority. As Secretary Rice has said, we will not abandon the people of Gaza, and we continue to view Gaza as an integral part of a future Palestinian State.

But this situation did not develop in a vacuum. We believe that the Council needed to address the circumstances that gave rise to this situation, in particular by calling on Hamas to cease its acts of violence and to take the steps necessary to achieve genuine progress towards the vision of two democratic States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security.

Terrorist groups in Gaza continue to target innocent Israeli citizens with rocket and mortar fire on a daily basis. That rocket and mortar fire is unacceptable, and it must stop. Israel, like any Member State, has the right to self-defence. Hamas, having violently and illegitimately seized power in Gaza last June, bears responsibility for putting an end to this and other terrorist activities in and emanating from Gaza.

Most recently, Hamas orchestrated attacks on the border between Gaza and Egypt, resulting in tens of thousands of Gazans surging into Egypt in an uncontrolled manner, destabilizing the region by potentially facilitating access for terrorists to Egypt and the transfer of armaments into Gaza. To address those concerns, the United Nations supports contacts between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to consider ideas such as Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's proposal that the Palestinian Authority assume responsibility for the Palestinian side of the Gaza crossing.

The actions of Hamas are clearly at odds with the Palestinian people's aspirations to freedom and statehood. A Palestinian State will never be born of terror and violence. Those aspirations can be realized only through negotiations and peaceful means. Hamas must end the daily rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza and relinquish its illegitimate control of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority, under the legitimate leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad.

We truly regret that the Council could not agree to the draft presidential statement last Friday. That draft would have allowed the Council to act constructively by addressing this challenge in a comprehensive, serious and balanced manner.

In that regard, let me comment on the statement made earlier at this meeting by the Palestinian representative. We share his regret and that of others that the Council was unable to reach consensus on the draft presidential statement last Friday. We recognize that the current humanitarian situation is troubling. But the credibility of his assessment would have been enhanced if, at a minimum, we had heard from him about the terrorist rocket launches against Israel from Gaza — territory that is controlled by Hamas as a result of an illegal and violent coup.

It is regrettable that we do not hear from him on these points on behalf of his Government, as we have heard from his own President. Here, I shall quote President Abbas's statement of 22 January: "We, on our part, have condemned and continue to condemn the launch of these futile rockets against anyone. Those rockets are not helping and must stop". How could we not rally to support that clear and sensible position? I believe that most of us were ready to do so.

I have highlighted this point because I fear that the rhetoric we heard today will not help a process that has, as its ultimate objectives peace in the region, Israel's right to exist within safe and secure borders and the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State. In that regard, we too question the utility of meetings such as this, which often serve mainly as platforms for rhetoric and contribute little concrete support to what we want to believe is the Council's clear commitment to those objectives.

I now turn to Lebanon. The United States strongly condemns the terrorist bombing in Beirut last week, which killed Lebanese internal security forces Captain Wissam Eid and many other Lebanese. We extend our condolences to the families of the innocent Lebanese killed in this brutal attack. This bombing — the latest in a series of terrorist attacks targeting those who are working to secure Lebanon's independence and sovereignty — is a part of the continuing assault on Lebanon's legitimate institutions. Like the previous assassinations and bombings, this was an attack on Lebanon's democracy and on all those working to secure Lebanon's unity, independence and prosperity.

The United States will not falter in its support for the legitimate and democratically elected Lebanese Government. We appreciated the efforts of the United Nations to rapidly establish the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which will hold accountable those responsible for the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri and other, related crimes. We urge members of the Council and United Nations Member States to provide financial assistance to allow the Tribunal to proceed with its important work.

Finally, we renew our call for the immediate election of a new President in accordance with Lebanon's constitution, and we also call upon Syria, Iran and their allies to end their interference in, and obstruction of, Lebanon's democratic process.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

At the outset, I wish to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing to the Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

This year, 2008, marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Palestinian tragedy, and the beginning of this year marked the passing of the fiftieth anniversary of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. I wish to remind the Council of those two facts because I believe that they are of great importance. Do other members not see, as I do, that the Palestinians have long endured tragedy and suffering, and that they have every right to stop being patient?

I believe that the following explains many of the actions taken against the Palestinian people. Since 1967, the Zionist occupation authorities have attempted to create a new fait accompli by changing the legal status of Jerusalem and by building settlements — all of which are illegal — on the occupied Palestinian territory. For years, those authorities have continued to entrench that reality by building a racist wall that has

isolated large portions of the occupied Palestinian territory, reducing its size to less than 12 per cent of the historical Palestinian lands, or nearly 50 per cent of the total area occupied in 1967. These actions have been taken despite the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which stipulates that the building of the separation wall is illegal and contrary to international law and that the Israelis must dismantle it and compensate the Palestinians who have been harmed by the building of the wall. However, the Israelis have, as usual, continued to flout international legitimacy and legality.

Examples are found in the Zionist escalation of terrorism carried out by the occupation authorities against the Palestinian people, which is shown in the ceaseless campaign of assassination against the Palestinians, as well as in the killings — to which Mr. Pascoe referred — in the past few days in the occupied Gaza Strip. Unfortunately, the constant closures and the siege, as members are aware, is just one link in a long chain of actions, as is the detention of more than 11,000 people, most of them in Israeli prisons and detention centres, as Mr. Mansour pointed out in his statement this morning. Among them are hundreds of women and hundreds of children and over 900 Palestinian officials, including members of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

There have also been numerous incursions into Palestinian towns. Those incursions have terrified civilians, whose property has been confiscated and farmland bulldozed. They have also included the setting up of blockades and hundreds of checkpoints in a very small area of land, so as to hinder the mobility of the Palestinian people and make their lives unbearable.

As the Council is aware, and as members can daily observe, the ongoing suffocating siege imposed against the Gaza Strip has had a devastating impact on all aspects of the lives of more than 1.5 million Palestinians. We welcome the announced declaration of intention — which has thus far produced nothing, while all the suffering of the Palestinian people is ignored, suffering which is in violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. The Gaza Strip is still under occupation. That constitutes collective punishment of the Palestinian people, which is a crime under international humanitarian law.

Paragraph 2 of the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council at its sixth special session on 23 January 2008, calls for

> "urgent international action to put an immediate end to the grave violations committed by the occupying Power, Israel, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the series of incessant and repeated Israeli military attacks and incursions therein and the siege of the occupied Gaza Strip". (*A/HRC/S-6/L.1*)

The entire world has once again witnessed — if indeed it needed another example — the reality of Israel's intentions with regard to peace. Following the Annapolis Conference, as is their custom, the Israelis continued to escalate their campaign of wide-scale attacks, not just against Gaza but also against West Bank towns. Mr. Pascoe referred to that and provided us examples. Those attacks have resulted in many victims, including older persons, women and children.

As the occupying Power itself has announced, and as the Council is aware, it is also planning to continue to build settlements. All of that was in the wake of the Annapolis Conference, in contravention of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, Quartet decisions and even Israel's own pledges at the Conference.

I would like to warn the Council of the consequences of those actions for peace. The fact that the Israeli occupying authorities continue to flout resolutions pertaining to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, including those of UNESCO, is actually imperilling the Mosque itself.

Israel's goal is well known, namely, to undermine the very concept of peace. That is its usual behaviour.

Peace will come about only through full and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied since 1967 — including East Jerusalem, the occupied Syrian Golan and the Shaba'a farmlands — in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council and the Arab Peace Initiative, and through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on all Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, with fixed and recognized borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Peace must also include the return of refugees to their homeland, from which they were

expelled in 1948 through a wide-scale ethnic cleansing operation that many Israeli historians acknowledge.

In that regard, we would like to underscore the right of the Palestinian people to resist occupation. Describing their resistance as a form of terrorism is an attempt to obliterate that right. That right must be supported, not undermined.

I should like to remind the Council that the Palestinians previously decided to halt the launching of rockets. Those rockets have been referred to often in the Council, although they have never actually killed or injured anyone. Palestinians pledged to halt those launchings many months ago. During that time, Israel has continued with its usual behaviour: killings, extra-judicial executions, incursions and so on.

The United Nations, through the Security Council — the organ entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security — should shoulder its responsibility vis-à-vis bringing peace to Middle East and find ways to implement Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). The Council cannot fulfil its role unless it respects its own resolutions and works to implement them.

The situation in Lebanon continues to experience the effects of Israel's aggression that began on 12 July 2006. The Council did not attempt to halt that aggression at the appropriate time. That failure led to the general destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure. That has been underscored by numerous United Nations reports, and there is no need for me to cite document numbers. Lebanon continues to suffer from that aggression, in particular as a result of mines planted by the enemy and the cluster bombs it utilized. In continuing to refuse to provide maps to the location of those mines and cluster bombs, Israel is deliberately exposing civilians to the ongoing possibility of being killed by them and is paralyzing economic development and humanitarian efforts in many parts of Lebanon.

I should like to remind the Council of the daily letters from the representative of Lebanon with regard to Israel's ongoing violations of its terrestrial, maritime and air space. Such violations explicitly contravene resolution 1701 (2006), and I believe they are contributing to what is taking place in Lebanon today.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for steering the work of the Council during this month. Allow me to thank also Mr. Pascoe for his instructive and important briefing.

One week ago, this Council considered the ongoing crisis in Gaza stemming from the siege imposed by Israel. During that week, many voices were raised to denounce the collective punishment imposed by Israel on Palestinian civilians. More importantly, the resolution that you referred to, Sir, adopted by the Human Rights Council last week in Geneva, called for:

> "international action to put an immediate end to the grave violations committed by the occupying Power, Israel, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory". (*A/HRC/S-6/L.1*)

People are still watching this Council to verify that it is able to meet the challenge, that there is a lifting of the blockade and that crossings are opened to allow civilians to cross them immediately. Despite frustrations with respect to the Council's shortcomings in dealing with the substance of the Israeli-Arab conflict, many still place trust in this body and believe in its role in maintaining international peace and security. No one is disappointed if peace remains the ultimate goal.

The Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd, said in an article published in The Guardian on 23 January 2008:

> "There has never been a more urgent need for the international community to act to restore normality in Gaza. Hungry, unhealthy, angry communities do not make good partners for peace."

It is necessary today to normalize living conditions in Gaza and the West Bank, not only to put an end to the suffering of the people, but also to ensure that the comprehensive peace process that should have continued in the wake of the Annapolis conference has its credibility restored. That credibility was tainted and obstructed by the policy of fait accompli imposed by Israel, which is relying on the use of force and completely flouting international law and the relevant resolutions. The settlements have not been frozen, despite the inclusion of that measure in the initial

commitment undertaken under the Quartet's Road Map, and the separation wall is still being built. The blockade at the crossing points has not been lifted, nor are Palestinian institutions allowed to work in occupied territories.

Those are confidence-building measures that would make it possible to deal with the question of final status. The Annapolis participants came to an agreement on that, that is, borders, Jerusalem, security and refugees. That was all based on the baseline document of Madrid, the relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, announced in Beirut by the Arab heads of State in 2002, and was confirmed at the Riyadh summit in 2007. That initiative calls for a comprehensive peace based on an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories in 2007, particularly the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories.

From this standpoint, my country, Lebanon, insists that the issue of refugees should be resolved on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We reiterate our call for that repatriation, which is necessary. If it is not carried out, that will jeopardize the national identity of those Palestinians.

Israel's behaviour in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in Gaza, reminds us of the recent atrocious images of the war that Israel perpetrated against Lebanon in 2006, in which they systematically destroyed infrastructure and deliberately targeted civilians. The Lebanese Government has undertaken to implement the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006) adopted by this Council after the war of 2006. The goal is to restore security and stability in southern Lebanon. However, Israel continues to violate that resolution by continually violating, on a daily basis, the sovereignty of Lebanon. Last year, those violations totalled 872. There were 711 air violations, 32 sea violations and 128 land violations. The latest incursion took place in 2008, when Israelis went 200 metres into Lebanese territory, bypassing the Green Line and detaining a Lebanese citizen for one day. Israel continues to refuse to provide landmine maps. It dropped cluster bombs over southern Lebanon in the last war and refuses to provide maps showing their location.

We welcome the appointment by the Secretary-General of a representative to play a facilitator role in the issue of the two kidnapped Israeli soldiers, but Israel still refuses to resolve the issue of the Lebanese detained in its prisons for decades in very trying conditions. We call once again for their immediate release.

With respect to the Shebaa farms, despite the fact that we applaud the provisional geographic demarcation contained in the regular report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), we believe that that should be part of a diplomatic process in which all States and stakeholders must be involved in order to bring about a complete Israeli withdrawal. In the meantime, the identity of those farms needs to be determined once and for all. We call for a reconsideration of the proposal by the Lebanese Government, within the framework of the several proposals it had submitted that advocate putting the farms under a temporary United Nations mandate.

Since 24 November 2007, there has been no presidential election in my country. That is a source of concern for the international community and our brothers. In fact, this Council adopted, on 11 December, a presidential statement expressing its concern with respect to the postponing of presidential elections. The Lebanese Government has supported the comprehensive plan worked out by the meeting of the League of Arab State ministers, held in Cairo on 5 and 6 January 2008, in order to facilitate immediate elections, in accordance with which General Suleiman would be the consensus President of Lebanon. That same initiative was reiterated by the Arab ministers at their meeting held on 28 January.

Allow me to draw attention to the fact that the continuation of the political crisis once again raises the threat of more violent acts, as we saw last weekend with the death of eight citizens. Those unfortunate incidents, after which we announced special measures, are now being investigated by the judicial authorities. This Council is not unaware that terrorist operations have continued for the past three years. Such attacks weaken the stability, independence, sovereignty and security of Lebanon. They are aimed at eminent figures in the political, media and security areas and at constitutional, security and civilian institutions. In late 2007, a terrorist attack led to the assassination of General François el-Hajj, who was an eminent figure in Lebanon who had vanquished terrorism in the Palestinian refugee camps. The Council fully condemned that attack. 2008 began with another phase of terrorist attacks, and civilians were killed in an

attack targeting a diplomatic car in January 2008. Those attacks also targeted the internal security institutions, killing Captain Wissam Eid of the intelligence services, as well as a number of civilians. The Security Council condemned that crime in its statement yesterday. Attacks have also sought to destabilize southern Lebanon and to terrorize the international forces and their members. The most recent such attack targeted the Dutch unit.

None of those terrorist attacks has shaken the Lebanese from their commitment to the independence, unity and freedom of their country. The attacks will not undermine our resolve to renew national consensus or halt the march towards international justice that we have undertaken together. That is why I commend the efforts of the Secretary-General to take the steps necessary to establish a special international tribunal on the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri and his companions in order to prevent the criminals from pursuing their terrorist activity and thereby to strengthen peace and stability in Lebanon.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation adds its voice to every word of your statement, Sir. We understand your words today in this Council as representing the correct way of exercising the privilege of the moral veto against any attempt to turn facts on their head and every endeavour to rob of its substance the role of the United Nations in achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

We listened to the briefing given by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe this morning. While seeking to the maximum possible extent to gloss over the ongoing Israeli violations of all international norms and laws and contraventions of the Security Council's resolutions, and to obscure the facts on the ground, the briefing could not help but paint a very dark picture of the situation on the ground that the region has endured over more than 40 years of abhorrent Israeli settlement colonialism.

With regard to the monthly briefing by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe, I wish to express our dissatisfaction at its failure to address the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan. The item under which the monthly meeting of the Security Council is held is, as all colleagues know, "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". The occupied Syrian Golan is an intrinsic part of that situation, which has been brought about by the ongoing Israeli occupation of Arab lands. Today, we participate in this meeting of the Security Council as a principal concerned party, pursuant to the Council's own decisions. Proceeding from that, we call on the Secretariat to ensure that no such omission occurs in future briefings. We express our gratitude for all information concerning Israeli occupation activities in the occupied Syrian Golan.

The principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter and the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly all identify occupation as the worst form of aggression and the worst violation of fundamental human rights. Despite that fact, and the hundreds of cumulative resolutions condemning Israel by name for its practices in complete contravention of all such principles and resolutions, Israel — a truly unique practitioner of outlaw behaviour in today's world — has persisted and continues to persist in ignoring the most fundamental principles of international law and in engaging in violence, oppression and morally and politically irresponsible behaviour. Israel boasts of such shameful behaviour and flouts international law and norms.

A few days ago, Israeli newspapers printed statements by Yuval Diskin, head of the internal security service known as Shabak, in which he boasted that his service had killed 810 Palestinians, including 200 civilians, in 2007. Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter averred that the number was too low, and that the figure represented 5 per cent of those whom the occupation forces ought to have killed. One Israeli human rights organization reported that the occupation authorities killed 152 children in 2007, including 48 under the age of 14. That would bring the total number of Palestinian children killed between 2000 and today to 866, according to Israel's own calculations.

Israel has inaugurated the new year by shutting down the Gaza Strip, hindering the delivery of humanitarian assistance and plunging the entire district into darkness, in addition to unleashing daily massacres of Palestinians that claim dozens of young people and children, detaining thousands of Palestinian pilgrims and patients at the Egyptian border crossing, and preventing their return to Gaza. Israel continues to turn a deaf ear to all international appeals based on the principles of international law to halt the construction

of the apartheid wall and to release the parliamentarians, members of the Legislative Council, and Palestinian leaders whom it is holding without justification.

Syria strongly condemns such inhumane Israeli activities and calls on the Security Council to take immediate action to end such Israeli crimes and to punish their perpetrators. The international community cannot stand motionless in the face of such crimes, which rise to the level of genocide and crimes against humanity.

The failure by this Council in the past few days to adopt a simple presidential statement condemning Israel for its flagrant violations of human rights and internationally proscribed policies of collective punishment in the Palestinian territory, in particular in Gaza — owing to the position of a permanent member of the Security Council that always tries to tailor the deliberations of the Security Council to suit Israeli interests, whether such interests run counter to international law or not. That failure runs counter to the responsibilities entrusted to the Security Council by the United Nations Charter and sends the wrong message to Israel, namely, that it may persist in its aggressiveness and may behave as if there were no occupation and as if people under foreign occupation had no right to fight such an occupation.

More than four decades have passed since Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan. Israel continues to refuse to return the occupied Syrian Golan to its motherland, Syria, or to respond to relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 497 (1981). Israel's response to those resolutions has been in the form of the worst violations of international law, humanitarian law and human rights, perpetuating the occupation and preventing the inhabitants of the occupied Syrian Golan from visiting their families and relatives in their motherland, Syria. Such coercive treatment of thousands of Syrians in the occupied Syrian Golan, preventing them from reaching out to their own families, increases the suffering of our people and runs counter to the minimum obligations of the Israeli authorities, the occupying Power.

Not one home in the Syrian Golan is without relatives in the motherland of Syria. Here we recall the harsh humanitarian suffering of families of the Syrian Golan in cases of sickness or death when members of the same family are prevented from contacting each other. Syria emphasizes that the people of the Golan are Syrian citizens in an occupied part of the homeland. They have the humanitarian right to remain in contact and to reach out to their own people.

The tragedy of Syrian prisoners in Israeli jails continues unabated. Some have now been detained for more than 30 years without justification. Some have passed away and others remain there on their deathbed because Israel refuses to respect international humanitarian law. My country has dispatched letters in that regard to the Secretary-General, to the President of the Security Council, to the President of the General Assembly, to Security Council members and to governmental and non-governmental organizations, seeking their intervention to assist in resolving the issues relating to allowing Syrian citizens in the occupied Golan to visit their families and releasing Syrian detainees from Israeli jails. We are confident that we shall receive replies to those letters.

My delegation has repeatedly stressed that we are determined to regain our entire occupied land to the border of 4 June 1967 by all legitimate means available to us. My country continues to address the issue, at every opportunity, in our attempt to reach that objective.

The Arab Peace Initiative is the main opportunity that Israel ought not miss. It may not come again. That initiative also set aside all of the empty pretexts that Israel invokes. However, Israel has responded to all of the initiatives and efforts with provocative, escalating and unjustified steps. As was recently documented by the United Nations in the latest report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan (S/2007/698), Israel is strengthening its military presence, as well as military training, in the Golan and that is a new indication that it will continue its aggressive stance in contradiction to all of its claims that it desires peace.

All such events merely entrench the conviction of the people of the region that the Arab-Israeli conflict remains unresolved because Israel lacks the political will to end its occupation of Arab land and because this conflict is being managed by a specific group of countries, thus complicating matters and transforming what could become a just, comprehensive peace into a peace conditioned upon opportunistic, short-sighted calculations.

The policy of obfuscation by Israel, a policy based on daily attempts to place obstacles before

peace, thus pushing the region to states of despair followed by explosions of violence, is an entrenched policy that is shored up by Israel's daily practices. After some came to believe that the road to peace is possible in the aftermath of the Annapolis conference, the Israeli Government launched a new settlement campaign in the Golan and in occupied Jerusalem and acts of morally unjustified killing of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, which has led many to believe that negotiations are but a waste of time.

The number of Israeli settlers in the occupied Arab territories increased by 5 per cent last year. Israel has attempted to draw international parties into a new game, a game of redefining the concept of settlement and dividing it into both legitimate and illegitimate aspects. Israel inaugurated the New Year with intense and illegitimate acts of military aggression against Palestinian civilians. Such military attacks clearly complicate the very fragile situation on the ground and will work to defeat the hopes that some had in the Annapolis conference.

The Arabs have again shown that they want a peace that puts an end to Israeli occupation, a peace built on the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Beirut conference in 2002 and re-launched by Arab leaders at the Riyadh summit. The Arab commitment to a just and comprehensive peace requires a reciprocal, serious commitment by the Israeli Government and its standard bearers to work for peace, which includes abiding by the resolutions of international legitimacy and withdrawing from the occupied lands in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Syria has opted for a just and comprehensive peace as a strategic choice, based on the well-known Madrid terms of reference and the resolutions of international legitimacy. These require the return of all occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, to the line of 4 June 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The continuation of the occupation runs counter to peace; it means more strife, more victims and more destruction. A just and comprehensive peace is my country's strategic option, but not at the expense of our national rights or sovereignty. President Bashar Al-Assad stressed that when he said that a just and comprehensive peace was a strategic option, but not at the expense of Syrian land or sovereignty.

My colleague, the head of the United States delegation referred to my country when he was discussing the situation in Lebanon. In that context, I should like to remind members that Syria not only supported the Arab Peace Initiative — whose implementation is currently being supervised by Mr. Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States — but also helped to create it and participated in the meeting of foreign ministers at which it was formulated. Therefore, Syria is very keen to ensure the Initiative's success and to assist our Lebanese brothers in reaching agreement among themselves in order to achieve security and put an end to Lebanon's current constitutional crisis.

We interpret the call for non-interference in Lebanon's internal affairs as a call on all parties, including the United States of America and others. No one must interfere in Lebanon's internal affairs. Once no one is doing so, we shall help the Lebanese to reach agreement among themselves and to put an end to the crisis in Lebanon.

I wish to reiterate my country's total condemnation of all the acts of assassination that have taken place in Lebanon. Such assassinations are aimed at the Lebanese people themselves. Our condemnation was made officially, and I shall reiterate it to the members of the Council. Syria has every intention to find the guilty hands that have assassinated Lebanese people. We are confident that all the manoeuvres and attempts to distract us from the truth will be revealed at the conclusion of the investigations now under way.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the Permanent Observer of Palestine, who has requested the floor to make an additional statement.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I apologize for requesting the floor for a second time. I realize that it is late, and I had not planned to ask for the floor at this time. But I have done so mainly to respond to the representative of the United States. I also want to add that the continuous effort by the representative of Israel, the occupying Power, to repeat the assertion that Gaza is not part of the occupied Palestinian territory is a repeated exercise in futility. Because of the lateness of the hour, I would like only to refer him to the many distinguished scholars and authorities in the area of international humanitarian law from all corners of the globe, including Israel. They have proved, without a shadow of a doubt, that Gaza has the status of being under the control of Israel, the occupying Power. In that connection, I will refer to only one scholar, Mr. John Dugard, who has articulated this point very

extensively from the point of view of international humanitarian law.

With regard to the reference made by my colleague from the United States to the statement of President Abbas, we know very well what the President's position is regarding the rockets. In my statement, I went beyond the position of President Abbas, referring to him twice. I said that it was to his credit that he had succeeded in organizing a unilateral ceasefire — that is, stopping the rockets — and that it was Israel through its continuous incursions, extrajudicial executions and aggression against the Palestinians that had broken that unilateral ceasefire twice.

However, during the past three weeks, President Abbas has not only expressed his position that he opposes the firing of rockets because they are used as an excuse by Israel to continue its aggression, but has also made many statements condemning Israel's continuing aggression against our people in Gaza, including the siege and the extrajudicial executions. In fact, President Abbas wanted to declare a three-day period of mourning after the massacre committed in Gaza not too long ago. So, if one wants to refer to the position of President Abbas on this issue, it should be referred to in its totality.

Beyond that, as a member of the Arab Group, we showed a tremendous amount of flexibility and balance when we agreed to refer to the rockets in the draft presidential statement, which received the support of 14 members of the Security Council two days before last Friday. By so doing, we demonstrated that we were willing to deal with the issue of the rockets.

Yet the main reason for the tragedy in Gaza is not the firing of rockets. The position of our President is well known: he is against the firing of rockets, and he worked diligently to organize two ceasefires. The main reason is the occupation; the main reason is the incursions; the main reason is the starvation of 1.5 million Palestinian civilians in Gaza; the main reason is the extrajudicial executions; the main reason is the incarceration of 1.5 million people in a huge prison. To use Under-Secretary-General Holmes's expression, that is a collective punishment and a violation of international law. To try to reach agreement in the Security Council without balancing the draft, looking at only one of its aspects — the firing of rockets — without considering all the other issues facing the Palestinian people, is not balanced and not fair. And that is exactly what we said.

But be that as it may, we are delighted by this debate and by the exercise by which the 15 members of this Council supported the initiative of the Palestinian Authority to deal with the crossings into Gaza. That is the concrete solution to this tragedy regarding our people in Gaza. The borders need to be opened, people need to get in and out, goods need to get in and out.

Therefore, this exercise of trying to punish 1.5 million Palestinian people because some people have political positions vis-à-vis a political party that is powerful in Gaza is not working. We should not play with the lives of 1.5 million civilians in Gaza. That should be put aside to that we can concentrate on the practical political elements that we need to face.

The most important element is to deal with opening the borders. We thank all members of the Council for supporting the initiative of the Palestinian Authority to assume the responsibility at all of the crossings from the Palestinian side. We also thank the Quartet for that position, as well as the Arab League ministerial meeting.

Our President is working very hard with President Mubarak, with the Europeans, the Israelis, the Americans and others, to find a solution to this situation. If we succeed, and we hope that we do — and the Council's help in this connection is very valuable — then we can put an end to the tragedy that the civil population in Gaza is facing.

That would not mean that we have succeeded in putting an end to the occupation that started in 1967, as President Bush put it clearly, but we hope that through negotiations with the Israeli side, and with the help of all the members of the Council, we will succeed before the end of the year 2008 in reaching a peace treaty to put an end to occupation and allow our Palestinian State to be born in all of the areas that Israel occupied in 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and with a just, agreed-upon resolution to the refugee question on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Many members of the Council here today have expressed through this debate their concern over the futility of these meetings, and they may now justifiably feel they were right. I wish to express my own sentiment that I did feel such futility through much of the meeting's duration. However, I feel that the meeting did ultimately serve an important purpose. It illustrated vividly and graphically how

important it is to ensure that the membership of the Security Council is carefully screened and considered, and how much responsibility it carries with it. As specified by Article 23 of the Charter of the United Nations,

> "The General Assembly shall elect ten other Members of the United Nations to be non-permanent members of the Security Council, due regard being specially paid, in the first instance to the contribution of Members of the United Nations to the maintenance of international peace and security ...".

The importance of this paragraph was highlighted today by the litany of bias, distortion, bigotry and hate delivered by a representative of a country that was itself under sanctions by this Council not long ago. The same people who gave the world Lockerbie are trying to lecture this Council on human rights. The fact that he was congratulated by the assassins of Damascus, who are themselves under investigation by this Council, only added a sense of the surreal to it.

That this was done by the President of this Council while expressing his total support for terrorism should alarm us all as to what awaits us and what awaits this Council in the next 23 months. Maybe today all I can say is "TGIF" — "Thank God, it's February" — soon.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize to you, Mr. President, and to the members of the Security Council for taking the floor a second time in order to exercise my country's right to respond to the statement just made to this meeting by the terrorist State of Israel in this international forum.

The disregard shown by Israel for this international Organization and for international law had its genesis at the very moment when this Organization gave birth to Israel from historic Palestine with its resolution on partition. The partition resolution conditioned the creation of the State of Israel on the establishment of a Palestinian State side by side with the new State of Israel in the land of Palestine. Since the adoption of that resolution more than sixty years ago, the birth of the Palestinian State has not taken place.

Organized Israeli terrorism, State terrorism, by the Ergun and Stern Gang at the time, led by former Israeli Prime Ministers, undermined the noble objective that this international Organization had provided for. By its organized terrorism, Israel has killed hundreds of thousands Palestinians and Arabs. Israel has occupied the land of others by force, in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. It has assassinated representatives of international legitimacy as well as of United Nations forces in the region. Israel committed the first act of piracy against a civil aircraft in the world in 1954. Israel introduced nuclear devices into the region in the 1960s, thus seriously exposing the region and its peoples to danger.

The representative of Israel boasts of his disregard for the presidency of the Security Council. What can one say? One cannot but say that the words of the Israeli representative increase his isolation both in the Security Council and in the international community. Such words show how unprofessional and immoral his reaction is to the very rules that govern the work of the Security Council.

The representative of Israel does not have the right to boast of Israel's State terrorism against the Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian peoples — and, indeed, the peoples of Jordan and Egypt. Israeli State terrorism has reached Tunisia and Iraq as well. Israel boasts of manufacturing missiles with a 4,500-kilometre range and capable of carrying nuclear warheads. What is the need for such missiles? Whom do they target?

Israeli State terrorism stands naked before the eyes of the international community. The words of the Israeli representative truly reflect his desire to turn the Council into a despicable theatre. However, we will not allow that endeavour to succeed. We have come here in an effort to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. No one should attempt to derail that undertaking.

The resolutions of the Security Council and the resolutions of international legitimacy are not mere polemics. This is a responsible political dialogue, whose primary objective is the maintenance of international peace and security. The goal is to avert a confrontation in our region, free the occupied territories and help the Palestinian people, who are languishing under the ugliest of crimes against humanity.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 2 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.5828

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5828th meeting

Wednesday, 30 January 2008, 5.45 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Ettalhi	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Muharemi
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	South Africa	Ms. Qwabe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. McKenzie Smith
	United States of America	Mr. McBride
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Twenty-fourth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2007/671)

Letter dated 30 November 2007 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council (S/2007/694)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

08-22138 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 5.45 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Twenty-fourth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2007/671)

Letter dated 30 November 2007 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council (S/2007/694)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/50, which contains the text of a draft resolution prepared in the course of the Council's prior consultations.

Members of the Council also have before them document S/2007/671, containing the twenty-fourth report of the Secretary-General on United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I wish to draw the attention of members to document S/2007/694, which contains a letter dated 30 November 2007 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Panama, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Viet Nam

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1797 (2008).

Following consultations among the members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council congratulates President Kabila and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the organizers of and participants in the Conference for Peace, Security and Development in North and South Kivu, on the success of the Conference, held in Goma from 6 to 23 January 2008.

"The Security Council is particularly pleased that the armed groups in North and South Kivu have undertaken to observe a complete and immediate ceasefire, to begin the withdrawal of their forces with a view to their brassage or their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration under the national programme for that process, and to abide strictly by the rules of international humanitarian and human rights law, set out in the statements of commitment (Actes d'engagement) which they signed with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 23 January 2008.

"The Council commends the Government for ordering a ceasefire in accordance with the statements of commitment. In the framework of the fight against impunity, while noting the Government's pledge to seek parliamentary

approval of an amnesty law covering acts of war and insurrection, the Council welcomes the exclusion of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity from the scope of this amnesty.

"The Security Council urges all the parties to the agreements to respect the ceasefire and to implement the other commitments they have undertaken effectively and in good faith. In this connection, it emphasizes the importance of the work to be carried out by the joint commissions provided for in the statements of commitment, and encourages the international community, including the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), to support that process. It also encourages MONUC to support the implementation of the statements of commitment, within the limits of its capacity and in accordance with its mandate, including with regard to the protection of civilians.

"The Security Council also welcomes the resolutions adopted at the Conference and calls upon the appropriate authorities to act on the recommendations addressed to them. It underscores the need for the Congolese authorities and all political and social stakeholders in North and South Kivu to continue, through dialogue, to seek long-term and comprehensive ways to address the root causes of instability.

"The Security Council reiterates the importance of the commitments undertaken by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Government of the Republic of Rwanda in their joint communiqué on a common approach to end the threat posed by illegal armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to peace and stability in both countries and the Great Lakes region, signed in Nairobi on 9 November 2007 (S/2007/679). It calls on the two Governments to continue to implement fully the joint communiqué, in particular by promptly taking appropriate measures to induce the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and other foreign armed groups to lay down their arms without preconditions and return to their home countries.

"The Security Council encourages the international community, in particular the eastern neighbours of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Great Lakes region, to fully support the new dynamic launched by the Goma Conference and the Nairobi communiqué, which together represent a major step towards the restoration of lasting peace and stability in the Great Lakes region."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2008/2.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.5829

Security Council

Sixty-third year
5829th meeting
Wednesday, 30 January 2008, 6 p.m.
New York

Provisional

President:	Mr. Ettalhi	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Muharemi
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	South Africa	Ms. Qwabe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. McKenzie Smith
	United States of America	Mr. McBride
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia

Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea (S/2008/40).

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

08-22246 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia

Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea (S/2008/40)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/49, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Belgium.

Members of the Council also have before them document S/2008/40, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea.

I wish to draw the attention of members of the Council to document S/2008/54, which contains a letter dated 29 January 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Permanent Mission of Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Panama, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Viet Nam

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1798 (2008).

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.5830

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5830th meeting

Monday, 4 February 2008, 10.50 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Arias	(Panama)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Wang Guangya
	Costa Rica	Mr. Weisleder
	Croatia	Mr. Muharemi
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Spatafora
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in Chad, the Central African Republic and the subregion

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

08-22691 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the retiring President

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first meeting of the Security Council for the month of February 2008, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. Giadalla A. Ettalhi, Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations, for his service as President of the Security Council for the month of January 2008. I am sure I speak for all members of the Security Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Ettalhi for the great diplomatic skill with which he conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Chad, the Central African Republic and the subregion

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Chad, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mbaye (Chad) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them photocopies of a letter dated 3 February 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Chad addressed to the President of the Security Council, which will be issued as document S/2008/69.

Following consultations among the members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council expresses its grave concern regarding the situation in Chad.

"The Security Council supports the decision of the African Union dated 2 February 2008 strongly condemning the attacks perpetrated by armed groups against the Chadian Government, demanding to put an immediate end to the violence and calling on all the countries of the region to respect the unity and territorial integrity of the member States of the African Union.

"The Security Council in particular welcomes the decision by the African Union to mandate the Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi, and President Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of Congo, to engage the Chadian parties with a view to ending the fighting and to initiate efforts aimed at seeking a lasting solution to the crisis.

"The Security Council strongly condemns these attacks and all attempts at destabilization by force, and recalls its commitment to the sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and political independence of Chad.

"The Security Council urges all States in the region to abide fully by the obligations they have entered into with regard to respect for and securing of their common border, in particular under the Tripoli Agreement of 8 February 2006, the Riyadh Agreement of 3 May 2007 and the Sirte Agreement of 25 October 2007.

"The Security Council calls upon the States of the region to deepen their cooperation with a view to putting an end to the activities of armed groups and their attempt to seize power by force.

"The Security Council calls upon Member States to provide support, in conformity with the United Nations Charter, as requested by the Government of Chad.

"The Security Council expresses its concern regarding the direct threat that the combats pose for the safety of the civilian population, including internally displaced persons and refugees.

"The Security Council reaffirms its full support for the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) and the European Union force (EUFOR Tchad/RCA), whose deployment in eastern Chad and north-eastern Central African Republic was authorized by resolution 1778 (2007), to contribute to the protection of vulnerable civilian populations and to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance.

"The Security Council expresses its concern over the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, United Nations personnel and European Union personnel and material deployed in Chad. It underlines that all parties have a responsibility to ensure the protection of all these personnel and of the diplomatic personnel present in Chad."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2008/3.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.5831

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5831st meeting

Wednesday, 6 February 2008, 4.50 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Arias	(Panama)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Koudougou
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Weisleder
	Croatia	Mr. Muharemi
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis
	Viet Nam	Mr. Hoang Chi Trung

Agenda

Peace and security in Africa

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

08-22998 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 4.50 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peace and security in Africa

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Kenya, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Olago Owuor (Kenya) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Following consultations among members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Council welcomes the announcement of progress in the negotiations, overseen by Kofi Annan, between Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga on 1 February, including the adoption of an agenda and timetable for action to end the crisis in Kenya following the disputed 27 December elections. The Council welcomes the African Union communiqué, commends the efforts of the African Union, President Kufuor of Ghana and United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and emphasizes its full support for the Panel of Eminent African Personalities, led by Kofi Annan, in assisting the parties in finding a political solution. The Council deplores the widespread violence following the elections, which has resulted in extensive loss of life and serious humanitarian consequences.

"The Council expresses its deep concern that, despite the commitments made on 1 February, civilians continue to be killed, subjected to sexual and gender-based violence and displaced from their homes. The Council emphasizes that the only solution to the crisis lies through dialogue, negotiation and compromise and strongly urges Kenya's political leaders to foster reconciliation and to elaborate and implement the actions agreed to on 1 February without delay, including by meeting their responsibility to engage fully in finding a sustainable political solution and taking action to immediately end violence, including ethnically-motivated attacks, dismantle armed gangs, improve the humanitarian situation and restore human rights. Recalling the need to avoid impunity, the Council calls for those responsible for violence to be brought to justice. It expresses its concern at the political, security and economic impact of the crisis in Kenya on the wider region.

"The Council expresses its strong concern at the continuing dire humanitarian situation in Kenya and calls for the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons. The Council further expresses its concern at the safety of humanitarian workers and United Nations personnel and calls on all parties to facilitate their work and ensure their safety. The Council welcomes the decisions, following consultations with the Government of Kenya, of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide to dispatch missions to Kenya. It calls on Kenya's political leaders to facilitate the work of these missions and looks forward to being informed by the Secretary-General of their findings.

"The Council further requests the Secretary-General to report on how the United Nations can further support the mediation efforts in Kenya and on, as necessary, the impact of the crisis on the wider subregion and United Nations operations in the subregion."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2008/4.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.